



UNITED NATIONS



Women's political participation and gender parity in decision-making at all levels in the Caribbean

One of the themes of the recently concluded Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) tenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, which took place in Quito, Ecuador, was political participation and gender parity in decision-making processes at all levels.

The ECLAC Subregional Office for the Caribbean commissioned the preparation of a paper on political participation and gender parity in decision-making processes at all levels, which was one of the background documents of the regional conference.

This issue of Gender Dialogue brings a synopsis of this background paper and provides information on the progress of Caribbean women in their quest to participate in the political and decision-making processes of the subregion.

Within the last three years, there were no fewer than 13 general elections in the subregion, namely in the Bahamas, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Dominica, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and the non-independent territories of Montserrat, the Cayman Islands, Anguilla, the Turks and Caicos Islands and the British Virgin Islands resulting in mixed results for women.

The ECLAC study found that generally there has been some improvement both in political participation and in decision-making positions, but that the improvement is still not close to the attainment of the 30 per cent quota agreed upon by the Caribbean governments. Improvements remain sporadic and uncertain, with regressions recorded in some areas over time. The full text of this study can be found at www.eclacpos.org/publications Ref: [LC/CAR/L.129](http://www.eclacpos.org/publications).

Statistical Data on Women in National Parliaments in the Caribbean

Country	Elections	Seats	Women	% Women
Barbados	2003	30	4	13.3
Belize	2003	30	2	6.7
Grenada	2003	15	4	26.7
Cuba	2003	609	219	36.0
Antigua & Barbuda	2004	19	2	10.5
St. Kitts & Nevis	2004	15	1	6.7
Dominica	2005	31	4	12.9
Suriname	2005	51	13	25.5
St. Vincent & the Grenadines	2005	22	4	18.4
Anguilla	2005	11	0	-
Cayman Islands	2005	18	3	16.6
Montserrat	2006	12	2	16.6
Guyana	2006	69	20	29.0
St. Lucia	2006	18	1	5.6
Bahamas	2007	41	5	12.2
Jamaica	2007	60	8	13.3
Turks and Caicos Islands	2007	21	3	14.3
Trinidad and Tobago	2007	41	10	24.4
British Virgin Islands	2007			

Source: IPU – *Women in National Parliaments 2007* <http://www.ipu.org>

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Secretary-General Shocked and Outraged By Bhutto Assassination



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has strongly condemned the "terrorist" bomb attack that targeted the convoy carrying former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto shortly after her arrival in Karachi.

UN/DPI Photo# 191016 by G. Kinch

The global situation



Meryl Streep, actress and member of a women's rights group, Equality Now, addresses correspondents at a press conference on the campaign against discriminatory laws, in conjunction with the ongoing 49th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, 2 March 2005

UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Notwithstanding advancements in the political arena in recent times, women remain grossly under-represented at most levels of government in nearly every country. This has implications for the optimal functioning of democracy and impacts the ability of government to plan and implement effective policies and practices that equally serve the needs of women and men and, arguably, limits the development potential of societies. The Millennium Development Goals (2000) and the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) identified the critical need for women to gain greater parity in political representation and decision-making power, yet despite international commitment to attaining these goals, progress has been halting at best.

Women have gained the right to vote, and possess de jure equality, in nearly all member States of the United Nations. However, despite forming at least half the electorate in most countries, they continue to be underrepresented as candidates for public office. In 1995, approximately 10 per cent of members of national assemblies across the world were women (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Article 182), and even fewer women held positions in the government. These figures fall short of reaching the target of having 30 per cent of women in positions at decision-making levels by 1995 endorsed by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The figure of 30 per cent forms the so-called “critical mass”, believed to be necessary for women to make a visible impact on the style and content of political decision-making.

The 49th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in February-March 2005 reviewed the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly. The majority of member States reported that measures were introduced with the objective of increasing the participation of women in various levels of decision-making processes, and reported progress in getting women into positions of power (para 327). Equitable participation remains a challenge, however, and only 11 member States have reached the critical mass of 30 per cent of women in Parliament (para 331). While hailing the progress made by member States so far, the Commission concluded that a wide range of customs, traditions and stereotypes in most cultures impede women’s participation in decision-making processes (para 351). It called for the study of linkages between women’s economic and political empowerment (para 352), of the way in which women’s political participation leads to the transformation of political institutions and processes (para 353), and for the study of the costs of women’s exclusion vis-à-vis the goal of sustainable development (para 354).

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During the past decade, women’s visibility in, and impact on, public life has grown with women representing 11.3 per cent of all legislators in 1995, and 15.7 per cent in 2005. The overall increase, however, hides regional fluctuations, since the increase in the percentage of women in government positions over this period has been marginal. The growth rate of women in leadership positions remains low. Women’s responsibility for care work in the home means that they have to continue to choose between a career and child-rearing responsibilities, which leads many of them to opt out of competition for the top-level jobs. The lack of policies to reconcile family life and work fail to provide women with the necessary enabling environment for their career advancement and empowerment. Women are still largely absent from top executive jobs, especially in the traditionally male-dominated spheres of business, science and politics. In national governments where women hold ministerial functions, their portfolios are typically limited to social, family and cultural affairs (IPU 1999).

The Caribbean situation

Caribbean women have had a long history of political activity dating back to the period of enslavement when enslaved African women became active agents in the slave resistance movements and in early collective bargaining. In the post-slavery period, African women were joined by Asian women, mostly under indentureship, to struggle against coercive planter and government policies.

Today, Caribbean women such as the Hon. Portia Simpson, Billie Miller, Mia Mottley, Jacqui Quinn Leandro, Lillian Boyce, who are currently active in representational politics are household names, however, nowhere in the Caribbean has gender parity been attained either in the political process or in the public or private sector. In the English-speaking Caribbean, the average participation of women in Parliament averages 13.5 per cent, varying from 7 to 25 per cent. There are no quota laws and the electoral systems vary from proportional representation and single member districts with a first-past-the-post system.

The small size of Caribbean countries, coupled with the lack of access to financial resources, are among some of the major determining factors in the decision of women to participate in political life and the electoral process. Financing, in particular, negatively affects the participation of women in recruitment and nominations as well as the electoral campaign itself. There is also a direct link with women's work in the private sphere and their participation in politics as women are confronted with the difficulty of covering indirect costs such as family obligations that are inherent in conducting a long campaign and maintaining political support.

Initiatives to support the participation of women in politics include training undertaken by a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as the Network of Non-Governmental Organizations of Trinidad and Tobago for the Advancement of Women and the Caribbean Policy Development Centre (CPDC), which have also produced a women's campaign workbook, which provides women with "guidelines for winning in politics.

According to the ECLAC study, the interventions made by governments, NGOs and the international community have succeeded in some measure to raise awareness of the need for gender parity but the impact of these measures must be more rigorously examined to determine the extent of their success. The study highlights that female participation in the politics of the Caribbean is about 20 per cent overall. It also shows that participation for women is lower at the highest levels of decision-making and higher at the lower echelons of management.

Achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning. Equality in political decision-making performs a leverage function without which it is highly unlikely that a real integration of the equality dimension in government policymaking is feasible. In this respect, women's equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women. Women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved (Beijing Platform for Action, paragraph 181).



BARBADOS

*Hon. Miss Mia A. Mottley, Q.C., M.P.,
Deputy Prime Minister and
Minister of Economic Affairs
and Development,
LEADER OF THE
HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY*



BARBADOS

*Hon. Dame Billie Miller,
D.A., B.C.H., M.P.,
Senior Minister, Minister of
Foreign Affairs and Foreign
Trade,*

Elections and quotas

The two fundamental pillars of democracy and good governance are the right to vote and the right to stand for election. Women in many countries did not have the right to vote until the twentieth century. Even today, universal suffrage has not been adopted as a given right in all countries, and women often face a plethora of obstacles that undermine their participation in political and electoral processes.

These obstacles vary and range from discrimination in the electoral system to the lack of support of a given political party for the inclusion of female candidates. The challenges faced by females are often socio-economic, such as poverty, unemployment and lack of education, all of which place them at a disadvantage and affect women's financial ability to engage in the political process. In addition, women face ideological barriers such as cultural norms, fixed gender roles, the lack of training and confidence among women to engage in politics, as well as media portrayal of women in politics, which all serve to influence women's political participation.

Although many steps have been taken to support women in overcoming these obstacles, the participation of women in politics remains a challenge particularly in the Caribbean subregion. Among some of the strategies adopted at the global level to strengthen women's political participation include making appropriate revisions to the electoral system used, the application of affirmative action mechanisms such as quotas, improving voter education for women and training political candidates.

The quota system, also referred to as gender quotas, is an operational mechanism designed to fast track the participation of women in politics at the decision making level. It is a strategy for ensuring that women are brought into the forefront of political and public life and assist in removing the barriers which continue to hinder their selection for political positions. In countries where quota systems have been implemented, the strategy has been credited as one of the most effective affirmative actions to increase women's political participation.

Despite the fact that gender inequalities remain a persistent feature of governance and democracy in the Caribbean, political parties are resistant to the implementation of quota laws. The selection of female candidates to participate in politics therefore remains an issue to be addressed, since women are underrepresented in all areas of political life yet in many countries they represent over 50% of the population eligible to vote.

The underlying objective of the quota system is to ensure that women do not remain a few tokens in politics life, yet many political parties have adopted the attitude that to implement the quota system would be "tokenism" and would obscure the fundamental principle of individual choice. However there is much that could be gained from using the quota system, for example, it could be used a temporary measure not only to increase the critical mass of women in politics but also to assist in removing the barriers for women's entry into politics.

The Beijing Platform for Action called on governments to establish targets and implement measures to substantially increase the number of women in power and decision making positions. The target established by the UN Economic and Social Council is 30% of women in positions at decision-making levels - a target that was established to be fulfilled by 1995. Twelve years on and little progress has been made in attaining this target.

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PROGRESS IN WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION in the caribbean

Women in government at ministerial level, 1998-2005

There has been marked progress in the participation of women at ministerial level in almost all Caribbean countries between 1998 and 2005. The improvements vary between no change in St. Kitts and Nevis and a 27% advancement in the case with Grenada. Grenada is the only country that has surpassed the 30% quota with 40% of women in government at ministerial level. It is followed closely by Barbados with 29.4%; Bahamas at 26.7%; and Guyana at 22.2%. Other countries showing marked improvements were Antigua and Barbuda with a 15% increase; Cuba with 11%; and St. Vincent and the Grenadines with 10% each. While Barbados had almost attained the quota, their progress between 1998 and 2005 was very minimal and amounted to only 2.1%. Saint Lucia was the only country that suffered a regression with -2 %. Given Jamaica's headstart in attaining citizenship for women and their instantaneous election to political office in 1944, their progress towards attaining the 30 per cent quota is remarkably slow. The expected transformation with the ascension of the Honourable Portia Simpson-Miller to the position of Prime Minister in 2006 did not materialize in the expected improvement for women in politics. In fact her elevation was very short-lived as she lost the government in the 2007 general elections. For the time-being, the ministerial positions are still dominated by the men.

Disparities between Lower and Upper Houses

There is a noticeable difference between women's participation in Parliament in the Lower House and in the Upper House in 2006. In every instance where the data appeared, it showed a much higher presence of women in the Upper House or Senate where they are nominated than in the Lower House where they are elected. The greatest differences showed up in Saint Lucia, Bahamas and Guyana with 31%, 23% and 19% disparities, respectively. The lowest disparities showed up in Jamaica, Antigua and Barbuda and Grenada with 8%, 7% and 4%, respectively. The disparity is a positive development because it indicates a willingness on the part of governments to improve on the status of gender equality in the Parliament. Through this process of selection, some countries such as the Bahamas (43.8%), Trinidad and Tobago (32.3%), Saint Lucia (36.4%) and Grenada (30.8%) have attained and surpassed the goal of 30% participation in their Upper Houses. In the Lower House, on the other hand, only Guyana and Cuba have attained the 30% quota with 36% and 30.8%, respectively. Grenada is following closely with 26.7%, Suriname with 25.5% and Bahamas with 20%. Those which are lagging behind include Saint Lucia with 5.6%, Belize with 6.7% and Antigua and Barbuda with 10.5%. Special attention needs to be paid to St. Kitts and Nevis which have no women in the Parliament apart from the Speaker of the House.

Seats in Parliament held by women, 1999-2006 (Lower House)

The available evidence indicates that there is definitely an improvement in the participation of women in the Parliaments of the Caribbean both in the Senate and in the Lower House in some countries. The improvements are largely incremental and are by no means sufficient. In some instances there have been regressions. A point of celebration is that while in 1999 no island had obtained the 30 per cent quota in the Lower House and only Cuba was near enough, in 2006 Cuba and Guyana attained and surpassed the quota with Grenada, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago almost there. The largest margins of progress were obtained by Guyana which had a 15.2 per cent increase; St. Vincent and the Grenadines with a 13.4 per cent increase; Suriname with a 10 per cent increase; followed by Cuba with 9 per cent. Trinidad and Tobago experienced no change in the period and St. Kitts and Nevis dropped from 13.3 per cent to nil. Apart from St. Kitts and Nevis, the countries that regressed were Saint Lucia which fell by 8.7 per cent, Belize by 7 per cent and Jamaica by 5 per cent. The Bahamas, Antigua and Barbuda, the Turks and Caicos Islands and Dominica experienced small incremental improvement ranging from 0.4 to 5.7 per cent.

Political commitment

Experience at the international level has indicated that with political will and commitment at the highest level, there is a transformation in the implementation of policies to achieve gender parity. A simple and useful measure of political commitment is the extent to which gender is mentioned in the speeches of Heads of State. For example, in the recently held elections in Trinidad and Tobago (Nov 2007), all three heads of political parties spoke positively of the role of women in politics. In the aftermath of the elections the re-elected People's National Movement (PNM) kept its election campaign pledge to bring women to the fore in the new government. For the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, some 11 women were given powerful positions in government including the second most senior position, that of Attorney General. Throughout the Caribbean, women are advancing to positions such as Speakers of the Houses of Parliament/Legislature and that of Governor or Governor General. These appointments are generally "non-political" appointments.

The gendered nature of politics

The political arena can best be described as an aggregation of relationships between people in society characterized by power and authority. The gender roles ascribed to women and men relegates women to the private sphere of the home and men to the public sphere. Mark Figueroa identifies what he coins as gender privileging to the socio-economic outcomes and status of males and females in Caribbean society. Gender privileging is defined as a system of rights, exemptions, advantages and impunities enjoyed by one gender over the other and which gives one gender control over or access to expanded social space, resources, prestige and/or power.

PROGRESS IN WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION in the Caribbean (cont'd)

It could be argued that the male gender has generally been privileged in the public sphere, where they dominate the public social space (males in work outside the home; males socializing in public spaces; males in soldiering), whereas there has been a privileging of the female gender in certain facets of the domestic private sphere (females in domestic work; females in childrearing). However the privileging of the female gender with respect to the domestic sphere does not in general bring with it a gender privilege for women in the public sphere. When women enter the public space they are expected to perform roles similar to those in the home, however, in addition to the gendered division of labour is the gendered power relations where men are defined as the decision makers.

The domain of politics is one of power relations dominated by men. The Beijing Platform for Action identifies the gap between de jure and de facto equality amongst women and men as being the greatest in the area of decision-making. The statistics speak to this gap in every country of the Caribbean. The Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) identifies the underrepresentation of women in politics and decision-making as a violation of the democratic principle of fair representation, since it does not reflect the true composition of our countries where the number of women in the overall population is often far greater than that of men.

Parliamentary procedures

It is worthwhile to note here that Parliamentary procedures are not “women friendly”. In fact they are not gender sensitive at all, but given the role of women in the family, especially the single parent family, and the inequitable distribution of unpaid work between men and women, the impact is expected to be heavier on women. Reference is being made here to the long hours of Parliamentary sittings. In this regard, the women of Antigua and Barbuda must be congratulated for the stance they took to have the length of Parliamentary sittings reviewed to become more “human friendly”.

“Gender-sensitive Parliaments’ are regarded as those which institute family-friendly hours: they might end Parliamentary business at a reasonable time (e.g. 8 p.m.) and begin days earlier (9 a.m.); they might reorganize the work schedule and designate certain days as “family days”, or “committee days”; or they might spread Parliamentary business over a number of shorter days. Such Parliaments also institute specific measures to familiarize women with Parliamentary procedures and the political process in general, including mentoring systems. The more gender-sensitive Parliaments would ensure that all policies and legislation, including the national budget, were analyzed from a gender perspective. Finally, gender-sensitive Parliaments include a special Parliamentary committee in charge of monitoring obligations under national, international and regional human rights instruments, and are also entrusted with the task of proposing amendments to existing legislation, or introducing additional legislation, so as to protect women's rights. These Parliamentary committees enjoy a strong relationship to a number of non-governmental women's organizations.”

Participation in decision-making

Apart from legislative power, women participate in the decision-making processes through their positions of leadership in public, private and non-government organizations. In this regard, the historical development indicates some improvement in numbers overall which can still be greatly enhanced to ensure gender parity in the decision-making processes. Although there have been some overall improvement in this area, available information suggests that for some countries there is a fluctuation of levels over time.

It is interesting to note that the disparity in figures between men and women at the highest levels are not consistent with the disparity in the figures between male and female university graduates where the women surpass the men. The perception that there is a dearth of information on women in decision-making positions, especially at the lower levels, still exists. Many countries of the Caribbean have now surpassed the 30 per cent quota of female Permanent Secretaries

National gender policies

National gender policies are being given an increasingly important role in the quest for gender parity in politics and decision-making processes in the Caribbean as they seek to establish national positions in response to international agreements and conventions. They serve as a guide for the development of policies across sectors and projects and programmes based on gender equity. The gender policies identify critical areas for attention and assign responsibilities for implementation. They are being developed through a process of consultation with the national community. Governments, however, as in the case of Trinidad and Tobago, are exercising discretionary vetoes over the policies. Jamaica has been actively pursuing an increase in women's participation in political and public life through its national machinery; which includes the Bureau of Women's Affairs, the Jamaica Women's Political Caucus and other agencies. They have utilized legislation supporting non-discrimination and have ensured that women are both allowed to vote in all elections and are eligible to participate as candidates as well as to hold public office and be advocates in NGOs concerned with the public and political life of the country. The Jamaica Women's Political Caucus, an NGO, continues to provide leadership/assistance in the form of training, preparation and financial aid to female political aspirants on a non-partisan basis. In fact, for the recent national elections, the Caucus, from its Candidates Fund, was able to grant funds to each of the 28 female candidates to assist them with their campaign efforts. The Caucus also supports and facilitates the growth of women aspiring to leadership in other spheres of community or public life. The appointment of a female Prime Minister in Jamaica can be a further catalyst for improving the overall status of women.

¹ Mark Figueroa. 1998, Gender Privileging and Socio-Economic Outcomes: The case of Health and Education in Jamaica, in Gender and the Family in the Caribbean,

Breaking the glass ceiling

In the Caribbean a few women have risen to become heads of State. The first female Prime Minister in the Caribbean, Dame Eugenia Charles, served as the Prime Minister of Dominica from 1980 to 1995. More recently, Portia Simpson Miller became the Prime Minister of Jamaica in 2006.



Dame Eugenia Charles, the first woman to become a prime minister in the Caribbean, was known as the region's "Iron Lady." Mary Eugenia Charles was born 15 May 1919, the youngest of four children of John-Baptiste and Josephine Charles. Her father founded the Penney Cooperative Bank for peasants and became mayor of Roseau, the capital, and a legislator. Charles attended Catholic schools in Dominica and Grenada, then, from 1942 to 1946, she went to the University College of the University of Toronto and received a B.A. in law. She continued her studies of law at the London School of Economics and Political Science. When she returned home in 1949, she became the first woman lawyer on this Caribbean island.

When the Dominica Labour Party (DLP) attempted to limit dissent with a sedition act in 1968, Charles became involved in politics. In 1970, she was appointed to the legislature and in 1975, to the house of assembly, where she became the leader of the opposition. She co-founded the Dominica Freedom Party (DFP) which helped Dominica win independence from Great Britain in 1978. She

was elected to Parliament in 1975 and five years later led the Dominica Freedom Party to electoral victory over the discredited DLP, hence making her the first woman Prime Minister in the Caribbean

In 1980, Mary Eugenia Charles became Prime Minister of Dominica. She immediately began programmes of economic reform and to end government corruption. She was a strict constitutionalist and her colleagues consider her a brilliant lawyer and a savvy politician. In 1985, she won the second five-year term and also became Minister of Foreign Affairs, Finance, Economic Affairs and Defense. In 1990, she won her third term as Prime Minister. Her primary concern was to improve the lives of the citizens. She encouraged tourism to a small degree, but was determined to preserve the island's ecology and national identity.

Surviving a series of plots and even an attempted coup, Charles became established as one of the Caribbean's most robust defenders of conservative values. She once wore a bathing suit during a legislative session to protest a dress code for legislators. She was the foremost regional supporter of the 1983 United States invasion of Grenada and was at President Reagan's side when he announced the invasion to the world. She was also an enthusiastic proponent of privatization and structural adjustment, frequently confronting Dominica's trade unions. Dubbed the Caribbean's "Iron Lady", she was instrumental, together with Jamaica's Edward Seaga, in setting up the Caribbean Democratic Union of right-wing parties in 1986.

Eugenia Charles was narrowly re-elected in 1990. Having announced that she would retire at the time of the 1995 elections, she handed over leadership of the DFP to Bruce Alleyne in 1993. With the DFP losing the elections, Charles duly retired. She became a Dame of the British Empire.



The Most Hon. Portia Simpson Miller, became the first woman to hold the position of Prime Minister in Jamaica in February 2006 and the first female to hold this position in the 68-year history of the People's National Party, (PNP).

Mrs Simpson Miller who is known for her passion in representing the poor and dispossessed entered the political arena in 1974 when she won the tough inner city constituency of Trench Town West as a councillor for the PNP. It was the first time that the party had won that seat.

Mrs. Simpson-Miller was born in humble circumstances and has for decades committed herself to the upliftment of the poor and marginalized. Her elevation to the most coveted prize in the political arena, that of Prime Minister of Jamaica was however very short lived. She was defeated in the 2007 elections but retained her seat and leadership of the PNP.

The new face in politics



Dr Jacqui Quinn-Leandro is Minister of Labour, Public Administration and Empowerment in the Government of Antigua and Barbuda. Elected in 2004, she is a “graduate” of the training initiative to support the participation of women in politics, through the provision of training and capacity-building of potential female candidates offered by a number of NGOs, such as the Network of Non-Governmental Organizations of Trinidad and Tobago for the Advancement of Women and the CPDC, which have also produced a women’s campaign workbook, which provides “guidelines for winning in politics”. (See resources section).

The Hon. Dr. Quinn-Leandro has been making strides during her three years or more in office. She was the first woman to be elected to political office in Antigua and Barbuda. In 2006, she was elected President of the Organization of American States/ Inter-American Commission on Women (OAS/CIM). In May 2007, as the Minister with responsibility for Gender, the Hon. Quinn-Leandro hosted the ECLAC Caribbean Subregional Preparatory Meeting in preparation for the tenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, which was held in Ecuador in August 2007.

Women Heads of State

Most Caribbean countries have formally adopted the Westminster Parliamentary system of government with the Governor General representing the British Monarch. In recent years, a growing number of Caribbean women have been appointed to the position of Governor General, once the domain of males. Governor Generals act as the *de facto* Head of State in the absence of the Monarch.

The Governor General performs a number of ceremonial and constitutional duties such as delivering the “Throne Speech” at the opening of Parliament. In Barbados for example, under the Constitution, the composition of Parliament includes the British monarch, represented by the governor general, the Senate, and the House of Assembly. The governor general is appointed by the monarch and serves at the monarch's pleasure. Although the governor general must act in accordance with the advice of the cabinet or one of its ministers, the governor general has considerable influence and is responsible for appointing judges, commissioners, and senators and for voting in the Senate if there is a tie. The governor general presides at all meetings of the Privy Council for Barbados, an appointed body whose duties include the right to review punishments and grant pardons. In terms of legislation, a bill becomes law after it has passed both houses and has been signed by the governor general.

Executive authority in Barbados rests with the governor general, the prime minister, and a cabinet. The leader of the majority in the House of Assembly is appointed prime minister by the governor general. The minority leader becomes leader of the opposition.

Following below is a photographic snapshot of the female Heads of State in the Caribbean.

FEMALE GOVERNOR GENERALS

The Governor General is the representative of [Queen Elizabeth II](#) in the 15 States, where she is Head of State outside the United Kingdom. The Governor-Generals are *de-facto* Heads of State



1981-1993

Governor General Rt.

Hon. Dr. **Dame Elmira Minita Gordon**

Belize

Commissioner of Belize City 1970-1977

Extracted from

[***Worldwide Guide to Women in Leadership***](#)

¹ Mark Figueroa. 1998, Gender Privileging and Socio-Economic Outcomes: The case of Health and Education in Jamaica, in Gender and the Family in the Caribbean,

FEMALE GOVERNOR GENERALS *cont'd*



1990-1995 (†)
Governor General
Hon. Dame Nita Barrow
Barbados

Head of a number of national and international nurse organizations, North American President of the World Council of Churches 1983-1991, President of the World YWCA 1975-1983 and worked with the WHO before becoming Ambassador to the United Nations, Cuba and the Dominican Republic 1986-1990, candidate for the post of United Nations General Assembly President in 1988. She was the sister of Errol W. Barrow (1920-87), Prime Minister (1966-1976 and 1986-1987).



1997-
Governor General
Hon. Dr. Dame C. Pearllette Louisy
Saint Lucia

Teacher, administrator, Vice-Principal and then Principal of St. Lucia's College. (b. 1946)



2001-05
Governor General Dame
Dr. Ivy Leona Dumont
The Commonwealth of the Bahamas

Deputy Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Works and Utilities 1975-1978, worked in the private sector, Secretary General of The National Movement Party, Senator and Minister in the government 1990-2001. In November she was named acting Governor General, and confirmed by the Queen, 01.01.02. She had been appointed to serve as Deputy to the Governor General on two earlier occasions. (b. 1930)



1999-
Deputy Dame
Yvonne Maginley
Antigua and Barbuda

Appointed Governor-General's Deputy and Ambassador-at-Large. She is Former Director General of the Tourism Board in the Ministry of Tourism. In 2003 she was Created Dame Commander of the British Empire.



2007-
Governor-General
Louise Lake-Tack
Antigua and Barbuda

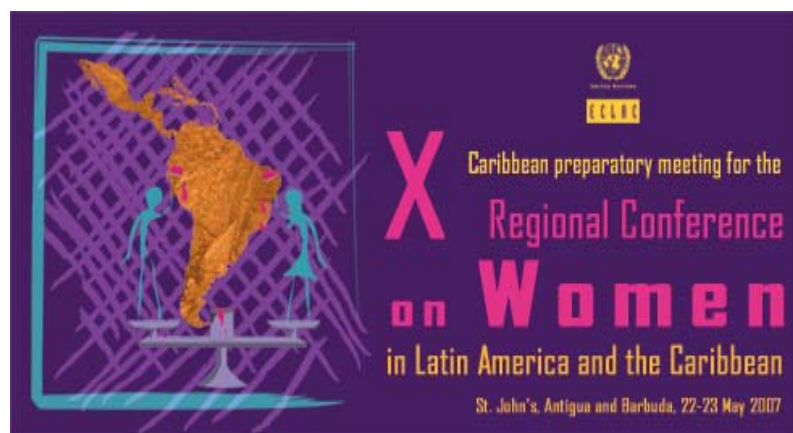
A former nurse and magistrate from 1995. (b. 1944).



2001-
Deputy Governor General
2002
Acting Governor General

Monica Jessie Dacon
St Vincent and the Grenadines
As Deputy Governor General since 2001, she acted during the illness and death of the Governor General until a successor was appointed. Acting Governor General on numerous occasions. (b. 1934).

NEWS UPDATE



Tenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean

The tenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean was convened in Quito, Ecuador, from 6-9 August 2007, and brought together ministers and other senior authorities responsible for the status of women and public policies to ensure gender equity in the countries of the subregion.

The two subject areas examined at the tenth session of the Regional Conference were political participation and gender parity in decision-making processes at all levels and the contribution of women to the economy and social protection, especially in relation to unpaid work performed by women.

The tenth session of the Regional Conference was preceded by three preparatory meetings in Guatemala, Antigua and Barbuda and Chile. The Caribbean subregional preparatory meeting was held on 22–23 May 2007 in St. John's, Antigua and Barbuda, in accordance with the agreements adopted by the fortieth meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women that met in Santiago, Chile in October 2006. The Ministers attending this Caribbean meeting prepared a Declaration for submission to the Regional Conference. The St. John's Declaration reaffirmed and endorsed the themes of women's political participation in decision-making processes and women's contributions through unpaid work. The Ministers also expressed their commitment to the achievement of gender equality, social justice, sustainable development and poverty eradication, in accordance with the relevant General Assembly resolutions and United Nations conferences.

Seven CDCC member States were elected to serve on the Committee of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference, namely Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Suriname and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Main issues

The main conference document "Women's contribution to equality in Latin America and the Caribbean" focused on the two themes of the Regional Conference - the contribution of women to the economy and social protection, especially pertaining to unpaid work performed by women, as well as political participation and gender parity in decision-making processes at all levels.

Reports were presented by 8 Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC) member States outlining progress with the implementation of the 2004 Mexico Consensus emanating from the ninth session of the Regional Conference. Among the highlights emerging from these reports was the formation in Antigua and Barbuda of a Centre for Women in Politics and Leadership (CIWIL), which was established to promote and increase the participation of women in politics, public life and management positions in the subregion. Among the strategies envisaged by CIWIL is the skills development and empowerment of women through education and training to enable them to function effectively as policy formulators and decision makers in the Caribbean. The Jamaica Government reported that steps had been taken to implement programmes and policies to address legal reform issues such as gender-based violence, poverty, the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and gender mainstreaming initiatives. In addition a Gender Advisory Committee was established to develop a National Gender Policy which, when completed, will allow for more effective gender mainstreaming.

Outcome

The governments participating in the tenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, represented by ministers and national machineries for the advancement of women at the highest level adopted the 'Quito Consensus' agreeing to implement a comprehensive range of actions to advance the status of women and promote gender equality. The Chairperson of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference was requested to submit the Quito Consensus for consideration to the ECLAC thirty-second session, scheduled to take place in the Dominican Republic in 2008, and within the framework of the events marking the ECLAC sixtieth anniversary, to hold a high level activity to evaluate the Commission's contributions in the area of gender.

Among some of the key decisions agreed upon was the adoption of the St. John's Declaration as an Annex to the Quito Consensus. Further there were agreements reached on the recognition of the importance of the economic and social value of the unpaid agricultural and subsistence work performed by women, and being aware of the need to make its work visible and arrive at an accounting of its contribution to national economies and to the cohesion of our societies.

The offer of the Government of Brazil to host the eleventh session of the Regional Conference in 2010 was endorsed.

NEWS UPDATE *cont'd*

Jamaica: Local Government Election Watch: Women Waiting to Make a Difference



Female candidates, who [make up](#) less than 20 per cent of those vying for a seat in Wednesday's (5 December, 2007), local government election, say they are hoping to making a difference. Angela Brown-Burke, People's National Party (PNP) candidate for the Norman Gardens division, is one such woman. With nine years under her belt as a councillor, Brown-Burke, who was the minority leader in the last term of the Kingston and St. Andrew Corporation (KSAC), believes she can have an effect at the local level.

"I feel that so much can be done at the local level that is not being done, and when history is written, I would like to be one of those who would have helped to make a difference as far as local government is concerned," she responds when asked if she has ambitions to enter representational politics at the national level.

Brown-Burke says she was inspired to become a councillor because of her love for community service. Her involvement in politics, however, began while in [high school](#), where she was the first secretary of the then Yallahs Community Council in St. Thomas. "I have always been community oriented and, when I came back from studying abroad, I started doing community work in Rockfort, and being involved in the party, it is just a natural extension of that kind of community [spirit](#) that I have," the 48-year-old tells **The Sunday Gleaner**.

She believes she has made some inroads over the last nine years with the encouragement of community-based organizations in her division, as the Rockfort Development Council, among others.

The vice-president of the PNP says she is proud of her involvement with the community in addressing issues affecting them, such as crime and violence and protection of young females in the community. "Although I have not seen the kind of results that I would want, I [think](#) that we have made strides and I am proud of that as well," she states.

Sally Porteous is the deputy mayor of Mandeville and is the incumbent councillor for the Mandeville division in Central Manchester. She also ran in the recent general election in Central Manchester where she was defeated. However, Porteous is banking on the hard work she has done over the last four and a half years, which she believes should bring home the seat for the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP). "I have done my best, I don't think that there is anything more that I could have possibly done over the last four and a half years," she relates. "I sincerely hope that people recognize that and will want me back again."

The 63-year-old says that while she has challenges being a woman in a field dominated by men, this has not fazed her. "It is still a boys' club and the boys like to stick together. But if you can weave your way through that, it won't bother you," she reasons. "I think that sometimes people don't think you can do it because you are a woman, they think you are not strong enough or will (not) push as hard. I have to remind them that you are not stronger than me, you are not more powerful than me and you are not going to do a better job than me. I am just as capable or determined." She believes that, over time, the society has become very harsh and cruel, and it needs nurturing. In this, she says, her commitment lies.

Joan Spencer is the mayor of Morant Bay and the incumbent JLP councillor for Seaforth division. She is also a very confident woman and has no doubts that she will win her seat back. "I am overconfident. As far as I am concerned, I have no competition," she quips. "I have worked very hard over the last four years and don't have to do any campaigning now, it's just touching base with my key workers, so for formality I am out there."

Her ambitions are boosted by consistent wins since 1998 when she ran as a councilor. Although males dominate her council, Mayor Spencer is unperturbed. "In the council, it is all right but you have some challenges out in the community where you interact with certain elements - the bad, the good and the indifferent will come to you for assistance," she states. But despite these challenges, she said she enjoys serving the community. "I enjoy when somebody comes to me with a genuine need and I can help," she says with pride.

Yvonne McCormack is a first-timer to politics but is no stranger in lobbying for the rights of her community. The last boycott she led was against the former government in protest of the toll road charges in Portmore, St. Catherine. But while this did not yield the outcome she anticipated, she is determined to make a difference at the local level. "I feel the need to change the look of local governance. I am a community person, but as a citizens' association leader, you can only talk so, I am going where my voice can make a difference." So far, she has faced no major challenges as a female politician. She says she was, however, apprehensive that persons would be very critical of her representing the PNP, in light of her former leadership in the toll road issue. "I think I have gained a lot of respect from that because people believe that if I was a closet PNP all along and took on the Government, then it means that I am not partial," she says.

Edited from an article written by Dionne Rose of the Jamaica Gleaner Newspaper, 2 December 2007.

Photo: Jamaica Gleaner Newspaper

<http://www.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20071202/lead/lead3.html>

UPCOMING EVENTS



Commission on the Status of Women

The 52nd session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women will be held at the UN headquarters in New York from 25 February to 7 March 2008. The priority theme of the session will be “Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women”.

The emerging issue of climate change will also be considered from a gender perspective during the session through an interactive panel discussion.

In addition, there will be a number of parallel events including one on the theme of the 53rd session to be held in 2009 on “The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS”

More information available at www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw



CEDAW Committee

There has been a change in the venue of the sessions of the Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women. As of 1 January 2008, the office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which is headquartered in Geneva, will take responsibility for the servicing of the CEDAW Committee sessions, however at least one session of the Committee will be held in New York each year.

The 40th session takes place from 14 January to 1 February 2008 in Geneva and the 41st Session takes place from 30 June to 18 July in New York.

CEDAW Elections

The next elections for the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Committee will take place in 2008. Members are elected for a term of four years. At least three months before the date of each election, the Secretary-General of the United Nations addresses a letter to the States parties inviting them to submit their nominations within two months. When electing new members, consideration is given to equitable geographical distribution.

Members of the CEDAW Committee are elected pursuant to article 17 of the CEDAW Convention by States parties from among nationals of that country. However, it is important to note that these members serve in their personal capacity and not as representatives of that States party.

The term of office of members begins: (a) On the 1st day of January of the year after their election by the meeting of States parties and shall end on the 31st day of December four years later; (b) On the date of the approval by the Committee, if appointed to fill a casual vacancy, and shall end on the date of expiration of the term of office of the member or members being replaced. Persons nominated by States parties are elected by secret ballot with each State party having one vote. Persons who obtain the largest number of votes and an absolute majority of the votes of the representatives of the States parties present and voting, shall be elected to CEDAW. Subject to the number of vacancies that have come up for each region, members are then elected accordingly.

The Caribbean presently has one representative on the CEDAW Committee, namely Dr. Glenda Simms of Jamaica whose four-year term comes to an end in 2008 however she will be eligible for re-election. In addition, member states can also nominate candidate(s) of their choice.

Resources

Women & Elections: Guide to promoting the participation of women in elections



[Foreword](#)

[Chapter 1 General Overview](#)

[Chapter 2 The Legal Framework](#)

[Chapter 3 Political Participation](#)

[Chapter 4 Voter Registration](#)

[Chapter 5 Voter and Civil Education](#)

[Chapter 6 Election Administration](#)

[Chapter 7 Election Observation](#)

Available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch>

Women's Campaign Workbook - Engendering Local Government Guidelines for Winning in Politics

An initiative of the Network of Non-Governmental Organizations of Trinidad and Tobago for the Advancement of Women (T&T Network), In Collaboration with The Caribbean Policy Development Centre (C P D C) Barbados, 2003.

The CPDC and the Trinidad and Tobago Network's Women's Campaign Workbook is a training resource to be used to prepare women to participate in the local government process as councillors and as advisors to the councils, as provided for in the legislation. This Women's Campaign Workbook is part of the effort by the Trinidad and Tobago Network for the Advancement of Women to "get the balance right" by giving interested women throughout the region the confidence and skill to become equal partners in political decision-making. Women are the political stakeholders with the strongest commitment to people-centered development and they ought to take their place in the process of public policy formulation imperative to the achievement of sustainable national development.

This workbook is available from the CPDC, P O Box 284 Bridgetown, Barbados

E-mail cpdc@caribnet.net or doccentre@sunbeach.net Website: www.cpdngo.org



International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics

<http://www.iknowpolitics.org/>

The International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW Politics) is an online workspace designed to serve the needs of elected officials, candidates, political party leaders and members, researchers, students and other practitioners interested in advancing women in politics. It is a joint project of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA).

The goal of iKNOW Politics is to increase the participation and effectiveness of women in political life by utilizing a technology-enabled forum. The iKNOW Politics Web site plays a central role in achieving this goal by offering users the opportunity to:

Access resources, including the online library and the information and expertise of other users, experts and practitioners;

Create knowledge through mediated discussion forums, information exchange and consolidated expert responses to members' queries; and

Share experiences by using tools specifically designed to facilitate the exchange of lessons learned and best practices among members of a global community committed to the advancement of women in politics.

TRIBUTES

Within the last three months, the Caribbean has lost two of its stalwart female activists, namely Ann Liburd and Clotil Walcott. In this issue of Gender Dialogue tributes are paid to these two Caribbean unsung heroes.



Ann Liburd
12 December 1920 – 13 September 2007
Former President, Caribbean Women's Association

Ms. Ann Eliza Liburd of St. Kitts passed on in September 2007 after a life dedicated to leadership and the empowerment of Caribbean women. Following is an edited excerpt on her life which appears in the book "Blaze a Fire" written by Nesha Haniff.

Ann Liburd was described by Nesha Haniff as a dynamo at conferences and meetings, an outstanding speaker and preacher, well-traveled, three times president of the Caribbean Women's Association, the President of the National Council of Women in St Kitts and creator or member of several other women's organizations.

Ms Liburd's whole life was dedicated to the service of other women. In many ways Ann Liburd's life ran the gamut of traditional women's jobs. She was born on 12 December 1920 in Antigua. Her mother was a washerwoman and her father was a farmer. Her mother was a strict woman who believed in education. When she finished high school and passed her Senior Cambridge, her ambition was to teach, which she did for a brief period. She was in the St Kitts civil service as secretary to the education officer. Upon retirement, she used her gratuity to open a "Specialty Shop", in the capital of St. Kitts, Basseterre. Here one could find a little of everything; colognes, the latest styles in clothes and freshly made "mauby" and ginger beer and Ms Liburd's coconut cake.

Ms Liburd gained leadership and visibility in St Kitts by excelling in the many activities in which she was involved. She was a strong church woman and worked tirelessly for women's organizations. Her connection to the church as a lay preacher and member of the church board was pivotal, as it enabled her to participate in the decision-making process of the church. In each arena, Ann was an example of how traditional female activity could be transformed to become a power base for women's own self-preservation. She used her access to skilled professionals to provide services to women and their families on the island – invaluable on a small island with limited resources.

As a shopkeeper, another typical female activity, she became entrepreneur not only for goods, but for local products. She ensured that her shop sold local products which provided the women who made these items with a ready market and at the same time promoted local culture. Though one of the unrecognized activities of women's organizations, the use of indigenous fruit and vegetables has been a major economic and cultural enterprise for small developing countries, whose only resources are local products and the skills of their people. Women have experimented with and created local products which benefited first their own families and their household budgets, but which in the long run, benefited both the larger economy and cultural character of their societies. Ann's goal within the various women's organizations was to teach women skills for self-employment.

Ann Liburd was an activist who sought at all times to address the injustices meted out to women. What made her an effective leader was her involvement in the various activities that kept her in touch with the women who were struggling to make it. She listened, observed and talked to the women. It is fitting that she was elected by the Caribbean Women's Association three times. The Caribbean Women's Association is an umbrella organization for over 500 women's in the region. Ann Liburd was their first president. The women elected her because they were affected by her dynamism, her articulation and her genuine concern for the welfare of women. She transformed traditional women's roles and activities with integrity, by restructuring the perceptions of what women do.

In her words, she believed in equality not in superiority. *I believe that women have too long been in the background, and they must come to the fore. In all population of the Caribbean, especially in St Kitts, women are more than men. Politicians all the time get up and say they are going to take the country 'forward' and 'progress'. You just progress with the minority and leave the majority behind? In Parliament – men make all the decisions for you.* Both women themselves and society have devalued women's work. Ann valued herself and tried to help other women value their labour. More importantly Ann Liburd was able to see the value in the everyday activities performed by women in her society and had the eye of a woman who saw the power and beauty in other women.

TRIBUTES cont'd


Clotil Walcott

September 1925 to November 2007

Founder of the National Union of Domestic Employees, Trinidad and Tobago

Clotil Walcott, the champion for the rights of the domestic employees recently passed on. She was instrumental in advocating for the recognition of domestic workers as employees and in recognizing the value of unpaid work performed by women in the home. Through her dedication and sterling activism, she was responsible for placing Trinidad and Tobago on the world map as the first country to pass a law to measure and value unwaged work.

In a tribute to Clotil Walcott, Prof. Rhoda Reddock described her as an *(extra) ordinary working class woman who attempted to bring before the public, the hardships, experiences and struggles of women, both in their paid work and in their unwaged work.* (Stabroek News, 26/11/07).

Walcott achieved many firsts in her lifetime, establishing the first union for domestic employees in Trinidad and Tobago, the National Union of Domestic Employees (NUDE) in 1974, as an arm of the Ship Builders, Ship Repairers and Allied Workers Union. By 1982 NUDE was registered as a Union in its own right under the Trades Union Ordinance. She fought valiantly for the recognition and protection of the rights of these workers under existing labour laws, however, domestic employees are still not recognized as workers, under the Industrial Relations Act. Unfortunately, domestic employees remain amongst the most discriminated and exploited workers in the labour market. Walcott herself once stated that “household workers do too much work for too little money. They are the hidden face of the economy”.

In the early 1980s, NUDE became the Caribbean representative of the International Wages for Housework (IWFH) Campaign, a global network of women who have been organizing since 1972 to get compensation for the unwaged work that women perform in the home. Through her links with activists, such as Selma James, in the metropolitan countries, Ms. Walcott waged a concerted campaign to have women’s work counted. The IWFH advocates called repeatedly for an analysis of women’s workload and lack of income emphasizing that women’s workload was continually expanding yet they received the lowest wages. The call for the inclusion of women’s unpaid work either in the Gross Domestic Product, or in a “Satellite Account” of each country in the subregion is seen as one of the most concrete ways of supporting women’s fight against poverty.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago stands alone as the only Caribbean State to pass legislation to Count Women’s Unremunerated Work in 1996, Act No. 29 of 1996. The Counting Women’s Unremunerated Work Bill was first introduced in February 1995, as an Act to “*require the Central Statistical Office and other public bodies to produce and maintain statistics relative to the counting of unremunerated work and to provide a mechanism for quantifying and recording the monetary value of such work*”. The Bill is designed to take into account and give value to a wide range of domestic tasks including agricultural work; care-giving of the sick, the disabled, the elderly and very young; work carried out in and around households; and unpaid “Social Safety Net” work.

In addition to this milestone achievement, she was also instrumental in the passage of the Minimum Wages and Terms and Conditions of Service for Household Assistants Order under the Minimum Wages Act in November 1982.

May the souls of these two women rest in peace as the struggle continues to be waged to end discrimination and bring about social and gender justice in the Caribbean subregion.



UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN
Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean

1 Chancery Lane
P.O.Box 1113
Port-of-Spain,
Trinidad and Tobago

Phone: 1-868-623-5595
Fax: 1-868-623-8485
E-mail: REGISTRY-POS@eclac.org

www.eclacpos.org

The Statistics and Social Development Unit of the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean has as its focus the conduct of research and analysis on the areas of women and development; population and development, (migration and teenage fertility), poverty, and other social development issues such as the conditions of vulnerable groups in the society, social reform and social policy formulation. In this regard, the ECLAC/CDCC secretariat is responsible for assisting member States with the implementation of programmes of action coming out of international conferences such as the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD); the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), and the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing Conference).



Group Picture, ECLAC Staff Members, September 2005



Gender Dialogue



GENDER DIALOGUE was created in response to calls from participants at the Third Caribbean Ministerial Meeting on Women, held in Trinidad and Tobago in October 1999, for a more systematic sharing of information and dialogue around policies and programmes for women. In addition to this call we, too, at the ECLAC/CDCC secretariat, have felt the need for a medium through which we could routinely share our work. The newsletter is available both in print form and at the ECLAC website. We are exploring as well, the creation of a chat room to expand the possibilities for dynamic dialogue.

Contact Us

Please feel free to send your contributions and feedback to:
The Editor, Gender Dialogue, Statistics and Social Development Unit,
ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean
P.O.Box 1113, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

Tel: (868) 623-5595 **Fax:** (868) 623-8485

Website: www.eclacpos.org

E-mail: REGISTRY-POS@eclac.org

Editorial Committee: Sheila Stuart, Maureen Afoon