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“Priorities in follow-up to the ten-year review and
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31 October to 3 November 2005
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Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

Prepared by
Jeanne Henriquez*

* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

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Jeanne Henriquez

Deputy Chair

Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA)

Curacao, Netherlands Antilles

Introduction

The twelve (12) critical areas of concern for the advancement of women, as outlined in the Beijing Platform remain high priority for women in the region. The enabling environment must be created for implementation of the *Platform for Action*, through effective collaborative mechanisms.

Since 1995, there is evidence that economic and political forces have been responsible for measures and policies, which run counter to the commitments made by our governments for implementing the *Platform for Action*. Many existing and subsequent policy decisions are in direct contradiction to the promises made. For example, few national budgets address gender imbalances in resource allocation, and labor legislation continues to deny domestic workers the rights and protection enjoyed by other workers.

Poverty

The low socio-economic status and growing poverty of women and their families, has led to hardship for vulnerable sectors of the population: indigenous women (who are to be found in the interior of Guyana and Suriname and in specific communities in Belize, Dominica and St. Vincent and the Grenadines) rural women, disabled women, young women and older women.

Employment of farmers - many of whom are women - in the banana export sector of some Caribbean countries is in serious jeopardy because of the United States' challenge to the preferential trade provisions granted by the EU to Caribbean countries through the Lome agreement. The social and economic consequences of a complete closure of the banana export outlet, combined with the region's vulnerability to natural disasters, are serious obstacles to achieving the goals of the* Platform for Action.* The impact of Trade Liberalisation on the region, and Gender and Trade issues need serious attention. The rationale behind trade liberalization suggests that the elimination of barriers to trade, the dismantling of protective regimes and the removal of government control over the market will fuel competition. This competition it is argued will in turn generate efficiency and productivity. However, the Caribbean region not only has to come to terms with the

loss of preferential markets, but with its inability to gain adequate access to European and North American markets. What has this meant for the goals of the Being Platform for Action?

It is clear from the trends that it is trade policy which lays the foundation for socio-economic development and to the extent that these developments impacts significantly on the lives of men and women in Caribbean societies. That is why a focus on gender issues on trade is necessary because the welfare of men, women and children throughout our societies can be determined by trade policy.

Antrobus classifies gender issues in trade as follows:

- Economic issues: housework and other un-waged work; salary and wages discrimination against women in the work place, labor force segmentation, treating women as reserve labor force, which results in lower wages for women and less job security;
- Social issues; the link between the role of men and women in economic production in the public sphere, and social reproduction, reproductive health, care of children and the elderly in the private sphere; and women's education
- Political issues; gender based hierarchies in households, the workplace and community
- Cultural issues: the vesting of women's rights to land in the family and the implication of this for agriculture policy, women's role as consumers and in determining household expenditures; the implications of women's multiple roles as farmers and as home-makers for productivity.

Five main methods of working have been employed by CAFRA:

1. Research and publications
2. consultations of membership and communities of interests
3. public education as well as economic literacy specially for members
4. Advocacy of an integrated rights agenda
5. Tool design-gender indicators on Trade.

Public Education-Economic literacy: Trade liberalization has always been a unit on CAFRA's specialized training courses for its members. CAFRA is also the administrator for the Caribbean Gender and Trade Network;

The challenge is to link gender justice with economic justice in order to counteract the growing inequalities of wealth and income.

We have to accelerate our efforts for the implementation of economic rights and economic justice, women's human rights and the strategies for financing sustainable development.

CAFRA's position on a humane and equitable economy encompasses among other things:

- embracing the philosophy and principles of an alternative economy based on sustainable development. This sustainable human development is pro-poor, pro-nature, pro-women, pro-children.
- Sustainable development starts with people their knowledge, culture and traditions as assets,
- It implies also, to strengthen and enlarge the capabilities of grassroots organizations as part of civil society to combat poverty.
- An effective strategy for poverty reduction must be responsive to the different categories of poor people , both in terms of their immediate needs for goods and services and their strategic need for empowerment and self-determination.
- A point of departure should be participatory action research(PAR). This methodology chooses for a reformed society taking the oppressed point of view as direction.. It is an action program to create political consciousness that involves action and reflection through dialogue. The point of departure is the concrete experiences of women, including: to listen how individuals from various social groups assess their own poverty and how various survival strategies operate. The training of participatory methods of inquiry, both at the grass roots level as by government agencies, is an important instrument. This training includes attention to augmentation of self-esteem, self-respect, self-determination

Violence

If police statistics are any indicator, then we are not doing enough to combat the problem of gender-based violence, and the growing current of misogyny in our region.

Also disturbing is the fact that in the Caribbean, the highest rate of new HIV infection is among adolescent girls. While women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and STDs is partly determined by physiological factors, it further reflects their wider economic, social and sexual vulnerability.

The trafficking in women for tourism and the sex trade, their recruitment for the drug trade and the growing number of Caribbean women incarcerated in the region and overseas for drug trafficking, are cause for concern.

Forty percent of the yearly import of cocaine in the USA goes through the Caribbean.

PARTNERSHIP to combat violence is an important tool:*

We have seen a weakening of the partnership between government and NGOs that was so evident during the Beijing preparatory process and at the Conference itself, when several NGO representatives led the government negotiations on key aspects of the *Platform for Action*. NGOs are called upon to assist in implementing the *Platform for Action*, at a time of dwindling resources.

Effective collaboration between governments and NGOs and between ngo's is essential for any improvement of the quality of life of our people, in particular to combat violence against women. However, partnership presumes also measures and criteria of accountability, for participation in the decision making, and for training in democratic tools for participation, in order for this partnership to be effective.

Changing the Environment

The rule of power of the WTO, multinationals, international financial institutions, like the IMF, the rule of power of rich countries, including the EU, do not provide an enabling environment, in particular to eradicate poverty. Therefore the strategy of empowerment

on the grassroots level is of vital importance. Empowerment is a political tool We need to empower principles like equality, justice, democracy and sustainability.

The enabling environment must be created for implementation of the *Platform for Action*, through effective collaborative mechanisms. There is need to engage the media as a vehicle for changed attitudes.

Women in power and decision-making

A review of women's participation in the parliaments of 13 CARICOM Caribbean Nations has revealed that only Grenada 32 % and Guyana 30.7% had achieved the 30% target. These were followed by Bahamas and Trinidad and Tobago (26.8%), St. Lucia and Dominica (21%) Barbados (17.6 %), St. Vincent and the Grenadines (14.2%), Jamaica (12%), Antigua and Barbuda (11.7%) and Belize (9.5%).

Another grave concern is the withdrawal by some government from international human rights conventions. This raises questions for us as to the future of governments' obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the optional Protocol to CEDAW.

We need to draw special attention to the needs of small states , in particular in the Caribbean, and to ensure their full participation

It remains critical that resources be provided to Civil Society by international agencies, for in particularly women's NGOs to enable them to address the strategies and action for the advancement of women. The criteria for getting these funding should include, practice of good governance, including participatory methods, inclusion of grass roots organizations and accountability. Democracy should not be any longer an illusion of inclusion. The empowerment of grass roots organizations through training in the use of successful methodologies on the critical areas of concern, in the use of participatory action research, and the use in general of participatory tools, is imperative.

This process of inclusion applies also to the non-independent territories. CAFRA has played an important role in facilitating the participation of women from the non-

independent territories in regional processes. One of the decisions take by CAFRA after a regional meeting in 1998 was that it is important to examine the impact of geopolitics on the Caribbean women's movement in these territories. This meeting concluded also that there was an absence, of the voices of women of the non-independent territories in the international arena and there is also an inability to access funding from development agencies for these territories.

Within the Caribbean there is more and more evolving a tendency by the colonial powers to use military bases within these territories in their war against drugs, which is in reality the war against not so friendly nations in the eyes of the USA, with the approval of the EU. We do not want this to happen. That is why women in CAFRA have been discussing the theme of the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace, because we women of the Caribbean renounce every form of military intervention in our countries and the militarization of the Caribbean.

Conclusion

To reduce and eradicate poverty: Sustainable development should be our principle and framework to work with. Training in economic literacy is imperative. This will empower women to take the initiative to change their lives and their environment. The use of the media is another tool that needs more attention to empower women on trade and its implication for their daily lives.

Research on the economic and political situation of the small islands and in particular of women in the Caribbean has to continue with full force. The use of participatory action research as a method is advisable.

To reinforce the democratic processes in the Caribbean, in order to address all the critical areas, in particular the issue of violence against women, it is imperative to empower grass roots organizations.

Partnership between government and ngo's and between ngo's is imperative. We need to empower principles like equality, justice, democracy and sustainability.

The need of demilitarization of the Caribbean is also important in order to allocate more funds for the critical areas of concern.

The international organizations, and the rich countries must allocate more funds for the implementation of the Plan of Action. However, NGOs and governments should attain to certain criteria, to ensure that the funds are being used appropriately.