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**REPORT OF THE MEETING OF EXPERTS ON GENDER
INDICATORS AND PUBLIC POLICY
IN LATIN AMERICA**

Santiago, Chile, 21-22 October 1999

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A. ATTENDANCE AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

Place and date of the meeting

1. The Meeting of Experts on Gender Indicators and Public Policy in Latin America and the Caribbean was held on 21 and 22 October 1999 in Santiago, Chile.

Attendance

2. The meeting was attended by statisticians from various countries of the region: Verónica Arruñada, Coordinator of the Integrated System of Socio-demographic Statistics of the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INDEC), Argentina; Natacha Molina and María Luisa Rojas, Deputy Director and Research Officer, respectively, of the National Women's Service (SERNAM) of Chile; Odette Tacla-Chamy, Head of the Department of Demographic and Social Statistics of the National Institute of Statistics (INE) of Chile; Thelma Gálvez, economist, Chile; Ana Rico de Alonso, Director of Research of the Pontifical Javerian University, Colombia; Rebeca Grynspan, a Costa Rican economist, Lily Jara, Technical Officer, Statistical Area, National Women's Council (CONAMU), Ecuador; and Constanza Moreira, Research Team Coordinator of the Third World Institute, Uruguay. Also attending were representatives of the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO), International Labour Organization (ILO) and Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) as well as officers from the following divisions of ECLAC: Social Development Division, Population Division –CELADE, Statistics and Economic Projections Division, Environment and Human Settlements Division and International Trade and Development Finance Division.

B. AGENDA

3. The Meeting of experts adopted the following agenda:

1. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work
2. Use of socio-economic indicators in the formulation of public policies. Regional scenario
3. Conceptual and methodological advances in the construction of gender indicators
4. National experiences in institutionalizing an information system on gender indicators

5. Contributions of civil society to the construction and use of gender indicators for monitoring and conducting a citizens' watch over the fulfilment of commitments made by Governments
6. Discussion of proposals and future strategies
7. Concluding remarks and closing session.

C. BACKGROUND

4. The Meeting of Experts was held as part of the technical work carried out by ECLAC in response to the interest expressed by member countries serving as Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean in having precise instruments for identifying advances and setbacks in terms of the status of women. In recent years, various countries in the region had initiated processes for collecting, analysing and processing sex-disaggregated data and procedures for applying the gender perspective to the production of statistical information and the use of social indicators in public policy-making.¹

5. ECLAC, through the work of its substantive divisions and regular publications, namely, the *Social Panorama of Latin America*, the *Statistical Yearbook for Latin America and the Caribbean* and the *Economic Survey of Latin America and the Caribbean*, was making a significant contribution in that regard and had made headway with the formulation of a proposal for gender indicators which would facilitate the accurate measurement of changes over time and comparisons between countries. That proposal was the outcome of a series of activities carried out by the Commission and which culminated in the preparation of a system of indicators for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of regional and international agreements aimed at improving the status of women and achieving gender equity; at the same time, those indicators were expected to facilitate and regulate the collection of quantitative data on the female and male population and serve as a guide in their subsequent analysis from a gender perspective.

6. Civil society had also taken steps to ensure the follow up to international agreements made by Governments and to promote their fulfilment from the perspective of social control. The activities of the organization, Social Watch, and the preparation of performance indicators were examples of such initiatives.

7. The factors described above had given rise to a situation which reflected also the combined efforts of social, political and academic actors interested in the issue, and further efforts should be pursued along the same lines.

¹ Not all relevant experiences were taken into consideration, since the meeting was only a preliminary one and of a technical nature. A more comprehensive study could be envisaged for the longer term.

D. PROCEEDINGS

8. The Deputy Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) declared the meeting open, welcomed all participants and wished them success in their deliberations. He said that it was of strategic importance for ECLAC to collaborate with member countries to achieve equal opportunities for men and women and that mainstreaming the gender perspective throughout the work of the Commission was essential, since it would determine the effectiveness of the latter's activities in the area of development; as such, it was a matter for all the substantive divisions and not just the Women and Development Unit. With respect to the technical aspects of the meeting, two items of the agenda were underscored: (i) the need for proper coordination at the national level between national offices for the advancement of women, statistical institutes and all public policy-makers; and (ii) the importance of making the most of existing sources of information, including household surveys, and of furthering the analysis of sex-disaggregated data through the use of new indicators.

9. There followed a free exchange of experiences and information between ECLAC experts, academics, politicians and representatives of civil society. The general purpose of the meeting was to analyse and systematize the activities carried out in Latin America in relation to the use of socio-economic indicators for decision-making, with special emphasis on gender issues. More specifically, experts assessed the conceptual and methodological advances achieved in the production of statistical information for measuring improvements in the status of women; some national strategies for the use of gender indicators; the potential and restrictions posed by institutional frameworks in some countries and the contributions of civil society to the generation of information.

10. With respect to the status of women, experts drew attention to the noteworthy increase in women's participation in the labour market and to the fact that in several countries of the region, more women than men attained secondary and tertiary levels of formal education; moreover, women were noted for their better performance and lower drop-out rate. Notwithstanding those achievements, their earning power was lower than the average for men and they played a very limited role in political and economic decision-making. In that regard, one expert pointed out that in collecting information on poverty among women, issues such as poverty of resources, time, autonomy, social recognition and political representation should also be taken into account.

11. The discussions revealed a series of challenges and proposals ranging from the need for a more in-depth analysis of conceptual and methodological factors and the production of important information for decision-making to the dissemination of statistical data. Those challenges and proposals are listed below together with a diagnostic analysis of the achievements and recommendations for the future aimed at different groups of actors involved in the production and use of gender indicators in Latin America.

12. In putting forward their recommendations, the experts affirmed that the conceptual, methodological and technical considerations relating to gender indicators called into question the scientific research model currently in vogue in the field of social sciences by criticizing the

sources and concepts of scientific objectiveness, quality and validity on which they were based. As regards gender studies, a long-term process was underway which would lead information-producing institutions to modify the assumptions previously in use.

E. AGREEMENTS ADOPTED

13. The Meeting of Experts on Gender Indicators and Public Policy averred that information was a public good designed specifically for the formulation of public policy and that free access thereto by producers and users was a civil right. In that spirit, participants identified the advances made and formulated the proposals set out below with a view to facilitating the further development of statistical information and gender indicators.

1. Conceptual issues

Advances

14. The preceding 10 years had seen major strides in the development of gender-disaggregated information based on an integrated perspective.

15. Other significant advances concerned the design of gender indicators and the collection of information for assessing the status of women, an area, which, until a few years earlier, had been treated as a marginal one and had only recently been recognized as a priority cross-disciplinary issue.

16. Positive efforts had been made to narrow the gender gap revealed as a result of those advances.

Challenges

17. The development of an information system centred on gender equity —which would imply expanding the population covered and identifying emerging issues— continued to pose conceptual challenges, in particular, the following:

- (a) The lack of relevant information for incorporating the gender perspective in macroeconomic policies;
- (b) The need for information on changing gender roles;
- (c) The need for information that would take into account not only the differences between the sexes but also gender relations;
- (d) The importance of identifying new inequalities arising as a result of advances in the status of women and the complexity of gender relations;

- (e) The need to further the analysis of certain indicators and foster an awareness of the complexity of their positive and negative implications, including the longer life expectancy of women and the increasing number of female-headed households;
- (f) The need to take into account the social context for each historic stage in the comparison of data.

18. A clear definition should be given of the problems covered by indicators designed for use in public policy-making; it was not simply a matter of following up on issues identified in relevant international mandates, but also of observing specific regional and national realities.

19. It is important to establish a link between the conceptual aspects of constructing indicators, the methodological advances achieved and the formulation of public policy, hence, the importance of ensuring consistency throughout the chain from their academic conceptualization through to their technical and institutional application and the monitoring of fulfilment of political agreements through accountability.

Proposals

20. The following recommendations are addressed to academic researchers:

- (a) The design of an information system incorporating the gender perspective challenges the traditional paradigms on which research in the social sciences has hitherto been based. This has a bearing not only on objective criteria and academic quality but also on data collection;
- (b) An effort should be made to elucidate the concepts, definitions and classifications used in the development of indicators;
- (c) Theoretic considerations on gender analysis should be strengthened.

2. Methodological and technical (production) issues

Advances

21. Important advances had been made in the preceding years in disaggregation of data by sex and in the generation of gender indicators.

Challenges

22. One should bear in mind the varying levels of development in countries and the different uses to which information is put.

23. Cooperation between users and producers is important for identifying requirements and for the exchange of gender information.

Proposals

24. The following recommendations were addressed to the national statistical agencies and the Statistics and Economic Projections Division and the Social Development Division of ECLAC:

- (a) Collect and classify all data by gender;
- (b) Make better use of existing sources bearing in mind that a new conceptual approach could expand the scope for data collection using instruments such as national censuses and household surveys, which, to a large extent, serve as the basis for public policy-making by Governments and by organizations within the United Nations System:
 - (i) The need to include new questions and tabulations in those instruments, so that the necessary information can be collected at low cost and without the need for investment of more resources;
 - (ii) The importance of making use of the new censuses which will be conducted in the region in the next decade;
- (c) Maintain the periodicity of the surveys and information processing;
- (d) Bear in mind, for purposes of data disaggregation, the need to cross gender variables with other significant differences between social groups including socio-economic, ethnic and age differences;
- (e) Intensify efforts for measuring poverty;
- (f) Construct not only diagnostic indicators but also indicators that monitor the achievement of gender equity goals;
- (g) Produce additional information on emerging issues that are fundamental to an understanding of gender relations, including the following:
 - (i) Domestic work and differences between men and women in terms of use of time;
 - (ii) Excessive demands on women's time and energy, due to involvement in community activities including reform of State social policies, which add to the traditional burden of domestic work;
 - (iii) New work procedures for women, such as home-based work, part-time work and distance work, including telework;
 - (iv) Analysis of social security coverage by sex;
 - (v) Comparative labour costs of men and women;
 - (vi) The status of women's reproductive health for which fertility surveys could be useful;
 - (vii) Statistical indicators on the extent of the problem of violence against women;
 - (viii) The status of indigenous and black women, including the relationship of the former with the environment;
- (h) Construct indicators for measuring the inequality of results faced by women in areas —including education— where equality of opportunities appeared to have been achieved;

- (i) Train civil servants in government agencies that provide information on conceptual aspects of gender indicators in conjunction with organizations that specialize in policies relating to women.

25. Academic agencies, government offices for the advancement of women and the ECLAC Women and Development Unit would do well to cross-check secondary data sources taking all due precautions, especially as regards information generated by public administration, with a view to achieving new advances in the production of information.

26. Government offices for the advancement of women in collaboration with civil society are urged to create mechanisms for on-going interaction between producers and users of information to facilitate identification of requirements and the exchange of knowledge, thereby promoting stronger national information systems.

3. Political and institutional issues

Advances

27. The adoption of the gender perspective —at least recognition of its importance— was said to be a major step forward among information agencies in all countries in the region.

28. Attention was drawn to the adoption of important initiatives by national women's bureaux for expanding and improving the use of gender indicators.

29. Experts welcomed the innovative uses being made of statistical information and gender indicators by civil society.

Challenges

30. The development of information systems is complicated by the disparate institutional frameworks existing in the different countries.

31. The vulnerability of information agencies to political decisions and to changes in their guidelines makes it difficult to ensure continuity in the application of gender indicators. Carrying out the tasks defined at the meeting of experts requires a strong political will and recognition that those tasks must be integrated into the official statistical systems and that it is not a matter of devising new concurrent systems.

32. Insufficient coordination between information agencies was reflected in a lack of integration between the different information systems. That problem was evident not only at the national level but also between Inter-American and international organizations.

33. The ineffectualness of information agencies and their susceptibility to institutional restructuring in some cases resulted in the elimination of established information systems.

34. Privatization of public services and decentralist measures caused problems in terms of fragmentation of information sources.

35. Producing and user agencies above all in the three main sectors —non-governmental organizations, the State and statistical institute— will have to carry out lengthy, painstaking work in defence of women's interests before arriving at the formulation of indicators.

Proposals

36. The following recommendations were addressed to national statistical institutes:

- (a) Foster an awareness of the responsibility of civil servants for processing sex-disaggregated data as a public good in the service of the society;
- (b) Defend their autonomy and right to apply rigorous criteria, irrespective of political pressures which can influence the use of information;
- (c) Create a gender department or unit to collaborate in the preparation of the work programme.

37. The following recommendations were addressed to government offices for the advancement of women:

- (a) Strengthen the political will of Governments to provide support for the above-mentioned processes;
- (b) Take the necessary steps to establish a legal framework for ensuring the collection of sex-disaggregated data by government agencies;
- (c) Foster the creation of mechanisms that would ensure that the information produced is taken into account in the formulation of public policies;
- (d) Foster the establishment of mechanisms for monitoring public information agencies and which could serve as supervisory authorities.

4. Strategic and political issues

Advances

38. Attention was drawn to the existence of social and institutional networks of women and experts and to the collaboration that existed between them.

Challenges

39. The establishment of links between indicators regarding equity-related goals and social policy reforms and the development of indicators of fulfilment of the latter for the monitoring, follow-up and evaluation of public policies.

Proposals

40. Academic researchers were encouraged to intensify research into the determining factors of gender inequality.

41. Government offices for the advancement of women were encouraged to take the necessary steps to integrate equity goals into sectoral ministerial policies.

42. The Commission, in particular the Women and Development Unit and the Statistics and Economic Projections Division, were urged as follows:

- (a) To promote the development of a basic set of synthetic indicators which represent the key aspects of gender equity and to define a strategic agenda of minimum agreements common to all countries;
- (b) To include in the basic set of indicators referred to above, indicators on the effects of the advancement of women in society as a whole, especially on economic growth and human capital;
- (c) To include, within that basic set, indicators that reflect the additional information requested in paragraph 24(g).

43. The Women and Development Unit of ECLAC was urged to promote collaboration between the group of experts participating in the meeting with the following aims:

- (a) To strengthen theoretical and conceptual reflection;
- (b) To further the exchange of information on methodological advances;
- (c) To establish standard procedures for the collection, processing and dissemination of information, as well as the preparation of key indicators;
- (d) To encourage more efficient use of existing sources and the development of indicators on emerging issues.

5. Civil society

Advances

44. Important headway had been made in terms of fostering in civil society a critical approach to compliance by Governments with commitments made at the national and international levels, and that approach was instrumental in strengthening civil rights.

45. The work of civil society —reflected, among other things, in the emergence of a “Citizens’ Watch” organization in Uruguay and the development of the Index of fulfilled pledges in Chile— had led to the preparation and dissemination of information on the status of women and had highlighted the need for statistical data.

46. Progress had been made in empowering women to assume a participatory role in consultations at the level of civil society.

Challenges

47. Strengthening dialogue with public institutions as users and legitimate entities for purposes of accountability.

48. Incorporating equity goals in policy making and in the evaluation of reforms.

Proposals

49. Civil society representatives were urged to consider the following:

- (a) To demand that public-sector bodies make information —considered as a public good— available to the public;
- (b) Establish more permanent relationships and closer links with the State;
- (c) Maintain and strengthen coordination with the work already started by the State;
- (d) Collaborate with government offices for the advancement of women in formulating a set of basic indicators for measuring the progress achieved in implementing a national agenda for women.

50. Government offices for the advancement of women were urged to foster the creation of a specific institutional structure which would serve as a framework for the relationship between the State and non-governmental organizations.

6. Funding and international cooperation

Advances

51. Considerable progress had been made thanks to the methodological work and information produced by the United Nations System, especially with respect to demographic statistics generated by the Population Division of ECLAC –CELADE.

52. Support from donor countries, notably Sweden, had been instrumental in the production of important statistical information in countries of the region.

Challenges

53. Safeguarding the financial autonomy of public information agencies.

54. Lack of coordination among the institutions referred to in paragraph 32, which also represented a formidable challenge for Inter-American and international organizations.

Proposals

55. ECLAC, and, in particular, the Statistics and Economic Projections Division and Women and Development Unit, were urged:

- (a) To develop, in collaboration with the specialized agencies within the United Nations System, an overall view of what information was already available or lacking in the region. The regional outline should include producers and users of information and the activities required;
- (b) To assume a leadership role in providing technical assistance to information-generating agencies.

56. Governments were urged to ensure that national statistical offices continued to receive adequate public funding.

7. Dissemination of information

Advances

57. Efforts were being made within the region to share experiences in disseminating information (efficient and straightforward use of technology) to help to meet the needs of decision-makers, women's groups, the media and others in terms of access to information.

58. The diffusion by Internet of data accumulated by United Nations bodies, the Inter-American system, some national Governments and organizations of civil society had facilitated the dissemination and exchange of information among producers and users.

Challenges

59. Guaranteeing access by all public agencies to the full range of gender-disaggregated information that was available.

60. Recognizing the political role of information dissemination in terms of shaping public opinion, which would call for the development of straightforward, clear and graphic statistics.

Proposals

61. National statistical institutes were urged to take all the necessary steps to disseminate information to wide sectors of the population.

62. The following recommendations were addressed to Government offices for the advancement of women:

- (a) Devise a legal framework relating to the right to information to ensure its dissemination;
- (b) Develop strategies for obtaining access to information held by the public administration;
- (c) Foster joint dissemination activities by the State and civil society.

63. All the actors involved were urged to intensify their use of electronic networks to ensure mass dissemination of the progress made in the area of information, production and implementation of proposals for meeting challenges.

Annex 1**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS****Experts in statistics**

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