

# **Identifying New Priorities for Achieving Gender Equality in the Caribbean**

**Subregional preparatory meeting of the XIV Regional Conference on  
Women  
in Latin America and the Caribbean**

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# The Caribbean - Where are we now??

- The Caribbean, is facing one of the most difficult periods in its modern history.
- It is still to recover from the loss of traditional areas of economic activity including agriculture and manufacturing, a result of the imposition of neo-liberal economic policies and is still in the search for viable alternatives;
- With a limited number of economic alternatives, all countries now compete in the area of tourism in which women, their bodies, their labour and sexuality are key components.
- For a few, energy based economies have been as much a curse as a blessing and we hope that Guyana will benefit from the lessons of those who went before
- The result - increased austerity, heightened social and gender inequalities and the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few; a middle class struggling to make ends meet and increasingly marginalized communities open to criminalization and a social environment of criminal, domestic and sexual violence.

# Caribbean Life



# Women's Autonomy

- What do we mean by Women's autonomy?
- In this presentation I define autonomy as:
  - The ability and confidence to use the information available to us to evaluate our environment and to make the best decisions for ourselves, our communities, our society, our region and our world.
  - Autonomy in this understanding therefore, recognizes that our decisions cannot relate only to our personal lives although this is critical and very important to our quality of life and personal survival. But it also relates to decisions in relation to the wider social, economic and environmental realities of our time.
- The question for us now is - how autonomous can women be within a region that appears to have lost its cultural confidence to collectively challenge the global and local hegemonic structures that shape and govern our lives? And what can we do to change this?

# **Poverty, Inequality and Macroeconomic Policies in the Caribbean – Priority 1**

# Changing Economic Scenarios

- As summarized by Shahra Razavi:
  - *In the last two decades public policies have reflected a drive for accelerated global economic integration ("globalization"), associated with greater economic liberalization. The outcomes have been largely disappointing, even in the estimate of their designers. Rural livelihoods have become more insecure, and the expected growth has rarely materialized.*

# **Global Economic Restructuring**

- The effects of the shift in the economic paradigm to one of economic liberalism has not been limited to countries in the Caribbean.
- Although economies like India and China have grown at phenomenal rates, there has been an exacerbation of internal inequalities and the pauperisation of large proportions of the rural population who migrate to the cities in search of work and become cheap labour open to extreme forms of exploitation not possible in other parts of the world hence the cheap exports.
- Over this period, we have also witnessed the deterioration of social life in many countries even as the availability of material goods for consumption has increased exponentially.
- This social crisis is most evident in our out of control violent crime and youth violence situation, a situation which is directly related to these economic and trade policies.



# Families/Households and Global Economic Restructuring

- Governments in response to directives from the IMF, World Bank and other bilateral financial institutions, have cutback on state support for households, social support systems and other areas of social care.
- Families and households and especially women, have had to take on a major component of the burden of care with little structured support.
- Families and households have also had to respond to the quick pace of technological change, workplace demands, migration of family members, increasing income inequalities, inflation and the resulting social dislocation;
- They have also had to respond to the new context of 21<sup>st</sup> Century parenting with its new media, substance use, hypersexuality, media violence and consumption/consumerist pressure.



# Poverty, Inequality and Caribbean Macroeconomic Policies

- Latin America and the Caribbean continues to be the world's most unequal region (Montevideo Strategy, 2017:15).
- According to a 2016 CDB Study:  
*Despite laudable efforts at reducing poverty and inequality in the Caribbean, high rates of poverty and inequality remain a pressing development challenge. Not only have high rates persisted, but the nature and face of poverty and inequality in the Caribbean are changing. In many cases, the situation has worsened with the onset of the global financial crisis ( p.14) .*

# **The Montevideo Strategy – Time for a Drastic Change of Economic Paradigm – Priority 1**

*In acknowledging the failures of this current economic paradigm: The MS observes:*

*“Given the demise of the prevailing development pattern, **it is time to make the transition towards sustainable production and consumption patterns that incorporate policies on the redistribution of wealth, income and time.** Overcoming poverty and narrowing equality gaps are essential to achieving substantive equality. It is also necessary to work for an international order conducive to the exercise of full citizenship and all human rights, including the right to development, which will benefit all women and girls and society as a whole (P. 16, emphasis added).*”

# **The Montevideo Strategy – Time for a Drastic Change of Economic Paradigm Cont'd**

*It is important to take active measures to prevent macroeconomic policies and fiscal reforms from deepening women's poverty, increasing the unpaid work and care burden and limiting —or reducing outright— financing and budgets for equality policies and machineries for the advancement of women, especially their work to prevent and eliminate gender-based violence (p. 16).*

# **Recommitment to Gender Equality as a key contributory factor to Sustainable Development – Priority 2**

By Caribbean governments, regional UN agencies, the CARICOM Secretariat other regional organisations and agencies to programme and policy implementation on gender equality;

# Gender is a Serious Matter!!!

- To a large extent our governments have not really understood the importance of gender and gender analysis in our lives;
- And we have not done enough to bring this understanding to the wider population.
- A clear understanding of gender analysis would result in more robust responses to many of the challenges facing the region; e.g. youth violence and criminality, gender-based violence, agricultural productivity, disaster mitigation, male academic performance, etc.
- Over the last two decades, women and gender affairs machineries have been weakened in many parts of the region and until recently the Gender Desk at CARICOM was not staffed;
- As a result these in many instances these agencies are unable to intervene in shaping public policy in ways that facilitate women's social and economic autonomy.

# Understanding Gender Analysis

- **Sex and Gender and the most fundamental characteristics of ourselves as human beings. They underlie everything that we do and what we are, even if we may not be aware of this.**
- Through gender analysis, we examine the differential impact which a given variable, factor or decision may have on women and men and in different circumstances e.g. economic status or class, race/ethnicity, sex/gender identity, geographical location (rural/urban), climate and disaster mitigation, ability/disability, age etc.
- **Gender analysis** holds within it the seeds for:
  - a deeper understanding of ourselves as individuals and as societies, and of many of the challenges that confront us; and as a result this provides:
  - clearer directions on how these challenges can be addressed.

# Gender Analysis and The CDB 2016 Report on Poverty and Inequality...

*...despite the fact that women have made significant gains in education this is yet to be translated into better labour market outcomes. **Disparities between men and women exacerbate poverty and at the same time, poverty causes the gap between them to widen.** Larger HHs are generally more likely to be poor for all countries, but the HH composition is also important. Different HH members, based on age and gender, seem to impact the overall wellbeing of the HH differently*



# Gender Analysis and Violence

- Globally, 38.6 percent of all women killed, die at the hands of their partners, compared to 6.3% of men, according to a study from the [London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine](#), June, 2013.
- T&T 2001-2013 – Average of homicide victims
  - Male – 89.9%
  - Female 10.1%
- Male on Male violence is also based on gender ideologies; gender ideologies that are not only destructive to women but also destructive to men;
- Today young men are not dying because the status of women is improving or because of our work on gender equality but because of destructive gender ideologies and gendered systems of power that are perpetuated in our societies.

# National Women and Gender Machinery

- The term “Ladies in Limbo” has been used to describe the status of national Women’s and Gender Machinery in this region.
- After a period when there had been some improvement, these units/desks/bureaux have reverted to a situation where with a few notable exemptions, as noted by Rawwida Baksh in 2012:
  - *“They were located at the bottom of the political hierarchy of government ministries, and allocated budgets that were often a fraction of one per cent of the country's gross national product (<http://www.guardian.co.tt/article-6.2.427778.3507d06712>).*
- Despite the existence of certificate, undergraduate and post graduate programmes in Gender Studies within the region, the majority of staff in these agencies, have not accessed such programmes, which affect the quality of programming.

# Gender Institutions – Montevideo Strategy

- *2.b. Strengthen machineries for the advancement of women by providing sufficient technical, human, political, administrative and financial resources and guarantee their sustainability over time, with a particular focus on the subnational and local levels*
- *2.c. Promote the establishment and consolidation of gender equality and women's rights bodies in sectoral ministries (including ministries of public administration, where they exist), decentralized agencies, subnational, municipal and local governments, and the legislative and judicial branches, by providing them with human, technical and political resources and a specific budget.*

# **Strengthened Human Rights Frameworks and Institutions - Priority 3**

# **Governments and quasi-governmental institutions must be held accountable**

- In the Caribbean there is little knowledge about human rights frameworks and institutions among the general public;
- Most are unaware that their countries have signed up to those protocols and never see the reports of the recommendations that emanate from those reports;
- Civil Society must be empowered to monitor these processes, submit reports to human rights bodies, request inquiries and to hold governments and other institutions accountable;
- Human Rights education must be mainstreamed throughout the education system and the wider society.

# Developing a Human Rights Culture and Awareness

Even as the region moves towards enhanced sexual and gender identity equality. The Montevideo Strategy document observes:

- “A general backsliding among governments in relation to the guarantee of human rights for all persons and the autonomy of women;
- The resurgence of discriminatory and violent patriarchal practices, discourses and cultural patterns that restrict the full exercise of sexual and reproductive rights, and the recognition of different forms of family, sexual diversity and gender identity.
- The discrimination and violence faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) persons by reason of their sexual orientation and gender identity and continuing obstacles encountered to access health care, good-quality employment, legal forms of union and family composition, and identity registration. (P.17)”



# Trinidad and Tobago April 2018





# Guns, Drugs and the Rise of Militarism

- Violence in many forms is the reality of contemporary life in this region.
- With high rates of homicide, robbery, sexual violence and other forms of criminal violence, there has been the intensification of 'securitization' and the creation of 'the security state' where in many ways citizens hand over their human rights to security forces in hope of protection from criminal violence;
- The violence of the security state adds to the criminal violence which affects the daily life of all especially the urban poor, whose children could be found on either side of the divide. Human rights systems to monitor and hold security systems accountable must be strengthened.
- Women are the mothers, sisters, partners and wives of the men especially young men involved in criminal violence and we have found that the status of young men is closely associated with that of their mothers.

# Montevideo Strategy

*1b. “Ratify and enforce human rights treaties; review laws, policies, plans, programmes and protocols periodically, and modify them if necessary, to bring them into line with international standards on women’s human rights, gender equality and non-discrimination; and ensure that all women’s rights are respected, protected and guaranteed and prevent setbacks.”*

# **Gender Socialisation and Care Work – Priority 4**

# **The CEDAW Convention - Article 5a**

*“States parties shall take all appropriate measures:*

*(a) To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.*

# Gender Socialisation and Care Work

- Challenge social and gender stereotypes and construct new ideologies of masculinity, femininity and sex/gender diversity and the challenge to the sexual division of labour through:
  - The valuing of care work in the household and the public and private sector;
  - Popular gender sensitivity gender diversity education through radio and television PSA's
  - Integration of age- appropriate gender and sexuality education at all levels of the education system;
  - In particular in the curricula of all teacher/educators, social workers, police officers, Health workers, psychologists, legal professionals etc.
  - Official use of gender-sensitive language in official publications etc.
  - Gender sensitive parenting education in schools and community based organisations e.g. police youth clubs, etc.

# Gender Socialisation and Care Work

- Gender socialization and the greater incorporation of boys and men in care work would be important to construct new understandings and practices of masculinity and shared family, social and community responsibility.
- Doing care work is an important component of gender socialization itself, and affects attitudes towards women and women's work which could have implications for violence against women,
- Gender socialization can allow for expanded educational and employment options for young men in particular.
- A commitment to gender equality and care can lead to more democratic and gender-aware approaches to child care, elderly care and reducing the burden on care which is often placed on women.

# The Montevideo Strategy

*“1.m. Promote measures, policies and programmes for the full engagement of boys, young men and men as strategic allies in achieving gender equality, promoting and guaranteeing women’s rights and eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls. Also challenging patriarchal practices and gender ideologies which negatively affect women and men and relationships between them ( p. 23).”*

*Design and implement plans for training and ongoing education, in partnership with academic centres, feminist organizations and international organizations, on gender equality, women’s rights, intersectionality and interculturality in all public institutions (P. 26-27)*



# **Support to Feminist and Social Justice organisations**



# WOMEN'S STRUGGLE AGAINST FEMICIDES

# Support to Women's and Social Justice Organisations

- One impact of the neo-liberal era was to shift the work and focus of social movements from activism, popular education and mobilisation to the delivery of services, in the past a state responsibility;
- Many civil society organisations then became dependent on the state for funding which is precarious and often inadequate as sources of independent funds had dried up especially for women's and gender-focused organisations.
- Some of the funds available, are so difficult to access and implement and provide little to institutional support to the organisations involved
- Support for the women's movement must continue to allow for autonomous and independent but collaborative work.
- Support for scholarly research is also critically important to guide action and policy interventions and programmes.

# The Montevideo Strategy

*3.a Support women's leadership in social and political organizations, promoting parity-based participation in democracy, institution building and the advocacy capacities of civil society organizations, women's and feminist movements, and, in particular, leadership among adolescents, young women, indigenous women, Afrodescendent women, rural women, migrant women, women living with HIV/AIDS, women with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) persons, respecting their organizational expression (P. 25).*

# The Montevideo Strategy

*“Establish or strengthen effective, institutionalized and permanent citizen participation mechanisms that are representative of the diversity in civil society organizations, to ensure their contribution to the design, implementation, follow-up and evaluation of public policies on gender equality and women’s human rights, especially macroeconomic, production and sustainable development policies and policies on the mitigation of and response to extreme weather events, risk management and resilience-building at the regional, national, subnational and local level (P. 25).*

# **Conclusions**



# Conclusions

- Sex and Gender are central organizing principles of all human life;
- Gender inequalities and oppressive gender ideologies are often so normalized that they are not questioned.
- These inequalities are embedded within global and local economic, judicial and political systems in ways which facilitate their continuation.
- Regional governments must take a more critical approach in relation to global economic prescriptions
- Feminist and social justice movements have done much to challenge these established systems but in the last two decades there has been much rollback of gains that were made;



# Conclusions Cont'd

- The development of scholarly research and theorizing in this area has brought new understandings of these complex phenomena however this knowledge has not reached Caribbean populations and sometimes even our gender divisions.
- Despite the successes of Caribbean women in accessing formal education systems, many challenges continue;
- The Montevideo Strategy if implemented could be a bold step towards its implementation but this cannot be achieved through state action only. The activism of women's and social justice movements is necessary to the transformation that this Strategy requires.

**Thank You**