

THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE BRASILIA CONSENSUS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, AN ANALYSIS BY THE CIVIL SOCIETY

SUMMARY OF THE CARIBBEAN SUB-REGIONAL REPORT*

The Caribbean region is comprised of a diversity of people, numbering over 6.5 million. Women make up just over 50% of the population of the 18 countries in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). Culturally, it is still a region given to male domination and most households are 'headed' by men. As a result, the struggle to achieve gender equality is an uphill battle, especially in regards to violence against women.

While CARICOM countries have signed up to many international and regional agreements, including the UN Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing PFA, the Belem do Para, ICPD, and others, the reality of action vs. paper commitments remains a vast and wide gap, and progress on their full implementation has been slow, and as a result, literally painful for women who are victims of violence against women.

While the majority of the governments region-wide, have put in place policies, programmes, and plans, in keeping with the requirements and obligations of the various treaties and protocols designed either to provide greater protection for women, eliminate discrimination, or to accelerate the commitments made, the reality suggests that much more needs to be done in order for women to see/feel the experience of the recommendations of Brasilia Consensus and the other positions that preceded it.

As a result of activists from Jamaica, Trinidad and other parts of the region and indeed the world, the rights of Domestic Workers is now enshrined in the ILO convention¹⁸⁹ on Domestic Work, the landmark international treaty, adopted on 16 June 2011. In the region Guyana is the first country to ratify ILO189 as of recent months so it will be strongly advocated for the larger states such as Jamaica, Trinidad and Bahamas to follow the lead and set an example for the entire region. To their credit Domestic Workers in the region have formed a network and rejuvenate their national networks. In Jamaica they are a union. Given they are women who swell the ranks of the working poor, they are an inspiration to the women's movement and women in general .

Women's citizenship's rights, in particular in regards to women's participation in representational or Party politics, there can be no denial that patriarchal norms still prevail and women's socialization is still oriented to 'excel' within the unpaid 'care economy'. Although we claim to have a democracy, it is "unfinished" and "uneven". Within the chambers of decision-making, a relentless drought seems



to have afflicted women's political participation in decision-making in the highest seats of 'community governance' our national assemblies, Parliaments and Senates. Women still endure a feeling of being second-class citizens in their homelands. In some countries women still do not have the right of inheritance and access to land ownership.

Women have the legal right to access to property other than land, which usually includes assets such as the family home and cattle. But generally acquire other property by combining resources with another person. It is rare for women to own secondary properties or vehicles.

All Caribbean countries have national machineries in place to steer the country's strategy on gender equality. However, in most cases, the resources available to the national machinery does not reflect the fact that gender equality is a development priority They have been working to ensure that there is gender mainstreaming in their respective Ministry, some have focal points.

Although they make up the bulk of voters and Political Party workers, they do not enjoy the fruits of their labour as candidates or political representatives. In the region, women are still expected to be in charge of the 'private domain' in the home, while the men dominate the 'public domain'. Further, most political parties are male dominated at all levels of their structure from candidate selection to development of the manifesto. Women's participation is also obstructed at the level of appointments to Public Boards and Commissions where in a number of countries about 75% of the appointees are males and the majority of chairpersons 70% or more. On the average across the region, 14.7% of female members of the Houses of Representatives are women, with Americas average being

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24%. Only 2 countries have attained 30% or more female representation, Grenada and Guyana.

The culture of the Caribbean is that males are “head” of the household. Across the Caribbean, 63.2% of households are ‘headed’ by men. On average 36.8% are ‘headed’ by women. However in some countries such as Barbados and Jamaica, over 40% of households are headed by women, while in Belize and Guyana, less than 30% of households are headed by women.

With the exception of Jamaica, Caribbean countries do not have entities whose job it is to gather data in a timely manner to effect more relevant and evidence-based policy and programmes. In particular sex disaggregated data on populations, housing, the labor force and employment data, education, health and social services are essential for short, medium and long term planning and visioning.

The English speaking Caribbean inherited a legal system from the United Kingdom. Most of the Common Law related to issues of Violence against women is antiquated and outmoded, including one known as “the rule of thumb”. With the process of legal reform, many of the laws that recognized women as only the property of their husbands and created the perception that women are inferior and that men are in a position of entitlement over women have been removed from the statutes, while others have been amended but Violence Against Women in the form of gender based violence continue to take its toll on the Caribbean nations.

Although most Caribbean governments have enacted or updated laws to deal with violence against women, this does not appear to be a priority for them. The increasing levels of crimes and violence against women and children speak for themselves. Most Caribbean countries now have or are putting in place comprehensive policies on GBV. In addition they have laws to punish incest, rape, and other forms of sexual assaults. Women’s groups are lobbying for stronger sentences, a change in the approach of the judiciary, protection for witnesses and complainants, etc.

The rate of femicides, gender based killing of women is also on the increase according to CISOCA. A true picture of femicides is difficult to access given the reluctance in some police divisions to collect sex-disaggregated and to name the killings as such. Domestic violence is used by many police divisions to name any kind of combative interaction among people living in the same house or ‘Big Yard’ that involves quarrels, threats, stabbings, shootings, etc. However in some jurisdictions e.g. Haiti and to some degree Jamaica, and T & T, men are the main victims of a particular type of political violence in the country. The practice of *zenglendos*, in Haiti which involves men breaking into a house to rape the female occupants, is

frequently used to exert political pressure or intimidation – in Jamaica it is young girls who are forced. In all 3 countries rates of femicides are between 20-100/year.

The poor reproductive health status of Haiti’s communities contributes to a life expectancy of 62.8 years for women in comparison to 75.5 years in the neighboring Dominican Republic. According to Haiti’s 2005–2006 Demographic Health Survey, 37.5% of women in unions have unmet family planning needs.

In Jamaica, the number of female youth between 15 and 24 years newly reported with HIV was three times higher than their male counterparts. This may be linked to the high rate of forced sex (50% of women, aged 15–24, first sex was coerced), sexual intercourse with HIV-infected older men and transactional sex. Basic knowledge about HIV and AIDS appears to be widespread. Three out of four people can cite three main methods of avoiding HIV infection. However, only 26% of women and 42% of men who reported having sex with a non regular partner in the previous year said they used a condom in this encounter. Haiti is the country most affected by HIV and AIDS in the Americas; UNAIDS estimates that there are approximately 170,000 people living with HIV. UNAIDS estimates that prevalence among the 15-49 age group in 2008 was 2.2%. Prevalence is slightly higher in urban areas (2.3%) than in rural areas (2%).

Despite the progress made over the past 20 years in reducing maternal mortality in the region of the Americas, the figure remain high in many countries.

In most Caribbean countries women’s control over their sexual and reproductive health is still denied them by male dominated parliaments and churches that work together to continue to criminalize women seeking abortions and even punishment of teachers/social workers who enable access of contraception to adolescents e.g. condoms in schools in T & T. Approximately 2000 women suffer damage to their health, because they are denied access to safe abortion procedures. Almost 4,000 women are hospitalized every year because of unsafe abortions.

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To see the complete report, please visit: www.feim.org.ar/consensobrasilia.html

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