

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

SUMMARY OF THE MEXICO AND CENTRAL AMERICA SUB-REGIONAL REPORT*

The Brasilia Consensus established a series of commitments to improve the life condition of women. One of the main problems in the transformation of the condition of gender in the countries of the region is that many of them have been forced due to the deterioration of the life conditions for most of the population, not only women.

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In Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama, the advances were much slower. Honduras coup, the militarization in Guatemala, repression to social movements, the criminalization of human right defenders and the close relation between the highest rank of the Church and the government are still influencing governments and the implementation of women's agenda.

Traditionally, we consider the incorporation of women in the labor market is positive, empowers women, gives them autonomy and broadens their horizons, among others. Even if this is true, it is also important how and in which conditions they are incorporated in the labor market, as well as how families and the States support them. Their incorporation has produced deep changes in the families, in the gender culture and the social role of women. These positive changes are stained by double work shifts, the increase of violence in general and violence against women in particular, and the problem of taking care of children, disabled people and the elderly. It is urgent that States take measures to provide the needed institutions to support the development of women, as well as the care for children, families and the groups above mentioned. Changes in the patriarchal culture prevailing in our societies require measures that go beyond childcare facilities, such as the incorporation of fatherhood policies so that men assume their role and take care of their children, and other policies that include the elderly and the disabled.



Apparently, women in the region have increased their participation in the labor market. Even official data¹ is alarming if we look at percentages; women's work has concentrated in the service and informal sector. In Mexico, while 85% of men participate in the formal labor market, only 46% of women do. Meanwhile in Belize, 81.8% of men and 48.3% of women; Costa Rica, 78.9% of men and 46.4% of women; El Salvador 78.6% of men and 47.4% of women; Guatemala 88.3% of men and 49% of women; Honduras 82.2% of men and 42.3% of women; Nicaragua 80% of men and 46.7% of women; and Panama 82.5% of men and 49.6% of women. The difference in all the countries of the region is that half of the women participate in the labor market compared to men.

An important element in the Brasilia Consensus was the commitment to carry out studies of the use of time and, in that way, make visible the unpaid domestic work. Mexico, Costa Rica, El Salvador and Panama have conducted surveys on the use of time, while Guatemala and Nicaragua have taken samplings and designed surveys; Of all the surveys conducted, Belize and Honduras only submitted data on unemployment. Although the methodology of Mexico and Costa Rica have been design models for Latin America and the Caribbean, and despite the fact that Mexico has a satellite account, the results are not yet seen in the employment public policies of any country.

No advance has been made in the region as regards economic, tax and property policies towards the equality of men and women. Despite the fact that there is a proposal to do it in Mexico, it is still not a fact.

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¹ Informe Sobre Desarrollo Humano 2013.

<http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/corporate/HDR/2013GlobalHDR/Spanish/HDR2013%20Report%20Spanish.pdf>

One of the pending measures by the States is the participation of women in the decision-making processes and the access to power. Even if all the countries of the region have quota laws for parliaments, the formal recognition of quotas does not translate in similar parliamentary seats. There are quota laws in all the countries of Central America which has been approved since 1996. According to them, in Mexico the proportion of women is 90%, in Costa Rica 35% and in Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama 30%. Their implementation is very different, being Panama, Guatemala, Honduras and Belize the places where they were less enforced. The participation in the Executive Power is much less than in the Legislative and Judicial powers.

The budget increases for training, promotion and development of women political leadership became accounting excuses in the application of the budget and the money devoted to women leadership training was turn to administrative expenses, per diems, support to party directors and cleaning products. The gender quota was overshadowed by the agreed resignation women who have conquered legislative spaces due to the new law, but then gave their positions to their men alternates before the mandate started.

In Mexico and Central America, women still own fewer properties than men. Data show an increase in small-businesses managed by women, however, the lack of properties prevent them to get loans, something that would help them become the owners of bigger companies. Gender and economic obstacles are the main barriers women face. Although there are some policies promoting the empowerment of women in the region, government programs have centered in productive projects and in the informal sector. The same happens with land tenure in rural, Afro-descendant and indigenous women of the region. Specific measures that allow women to have access to land and property have not been taken, except for widows.

The opening to new technologies of information in the region are diverse, from a total opening to a very limited one. In the case of Internet customers, the number is relatively low in the region, except for El Salvador, in which there is a strong change towards an increase in consumption and Guatemala, which shows a decrease in consumption. In the short-term, it will be a more current service. The use of Internet will increase and the consumption of ICTs will be more accessible and, they will reach more people in the region. The economic characteristics of the region offer us a clear planning on ICT investors. Much more money is invested in mobile phones than in any other communication technology, therefore, consumption is constantly growing. The opportunity for gender policies in these conditions are often effective because an adequate use of ICTs and an adequate approach can impact users in less time and with less costs. From 2010 up to date, some actions promoting use and access to ICTs by women of any age and place of residency have been developed. However, these actions are not enough and not only women Internet users but also

mobile phone users are concentrated in urban areas, despite the fact that the characteristics of our countries make people live mainly in rural areas. The measures proposed by governments are scarce.

All the countries of the region have passed and strengthen their laws and policies against violence against women, including the problem of femicide. However, there is still no significant change, and the data on human trafficking and on sexual violence in El Salvador y Belize are alarming. It is worth mentioning the increase of violence against women human right defenders in the last years, and this should be given special consideration.

Except for Costa Rica and Mexico, all the Central American countries are lay. Nicaragua and El Salvador have left-wing governments and so the State is lay by law; however, there are relations of facto power in which governments pay the election quota to the Church. The possible steps backwards regarding emergency contraceptive methods in El Salvador, is the result of this relation, as well as the criminalization of abortion and the attempts to teach religious education at schools. The influence of the Catholic Church in all Central America has been strong, and along with the increasing presence of other churches, it has influenced governments and stopped the advances on sexual and reproductive rights.

Regarding sexual and reproductive rights, and according to the Brasilia Consensus, there was little advance in the last three years. The recent criminalization of women who carry out abortions, such as in El Salvador and Mexico, are outstanding examples that, despite the existing regulatory framework, reality is different. Mexico, apparently, has a regulatory framework in favor of the sexual and reproductive rights, a framework which is contradicted by the criminalization of abortion. The same happens with the equal marriage law in Mexico City: social security has not yet been achieved and it is not yet recognized in the working environment.

One of the problems Mexico is facing regarding laws that favor women's sexual and reproductive rights is the legislative harmonization of federal bodies, in particular regarding abortion. There are geographical inequalities in the access to health services and family planning centers. This is worsened in the case of indigenous women, who are still marginalized and for whom mortality and adolescent pregnancy rates are still prevalent.

Indigenous women in Mexico and Central America suffer important inequalities in the access to family planning, contraception, abortion and HIV detection and treatment services. Such inequality is accentuated by poverty, the lack of geographical coverage of health services and the difficulty that supposes taking sexual health services without really knowing the communities. Public policies adopted should include the different indigenous world view and a right and intercultural approach.

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

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