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FOCUS ON GENDER

Labour markets, household work and the care crisis

Inés Bustillo

The care crisis in Latin America is escalating, and the region is in need of social protection and labour reforms.

Despite growing participation by Latin American women in the labour market and changes in family dynamics, men's share in domestic and care tasks remains minimal. This situation, compounded by ageing populations and the paucity of social services, is intensifying a care crisis that needs to be addressed promptly with measures that include reform of social protection systems and of labour practices.

Over the past 25 years the proportion of women seeking or engaged in paid work has risen steadily in the region. From 1990 to 2007, labour market participation rates among women in the economically active age range (typically 25 to 54 years) rose by nearly 20 per cent as a result of a range of factors, including declining fertility, delayed childbearing and rising educational credentials. Increasing divorce rates and growing prevalence of single-parent households headed by women are also prompting more women to enter the labour market and, increasingly, turning them into the sole income-earners in their households. In Latin America, 29 per cent of households are headed by women.

Irrespective of country differences, higher rates of labour market participation by women have raised total



Photo: Bernal/ECLAC, 2008.

Workers of the Fundación para la Productividad en el Campo, A.C., a female-led foundation working with local producers of the cactus (nopal) plant to sell the finished product in the U.S.; Ayoquezco de Aldama, Oaxaca, Mexico.

household incomes significantly. Although women currently earn only 60 to 90 per cent of what men earn on average—a situation that is indicative of gender-based discrimination in the labour market—their earnings contribute substantially to the reduction of poverty in many households.

Women are more likely to have poor working conditions, limited health benefits, lower rates of social security affiliation and lower wages. Also, they tend to hold

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FOCAL Views: Equality for growth

Women in Latin America and the Caribbean have gained ground in the labour market, but certain barriers and gender disparities still remain.

Continuing gender gaps hold back economic growth and development in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Although countries of the region have been largely successful in tackling health and education inequalities between men and women, the challenge ahead is to make similar headway on economic and political equality.

Women have made a marked entry into the LAC labour market. In fact, International Labour Organization data shows that the largest female labour participation rate increase worldwide occurred in LAC, where it rose by 5.1 percentage points during the past 10 years. In most countries of the region, this rate now stands over 50 per cent. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), differences in participation rates of women and men are the smallest in Bolivia, Brazil and Colombia, while the most important disparities lie in Chile and Mexico.

However, even where women form a crucial part of the workforce, they are concentrated in precarious, low-wage, low-productivity jobs. Women are more likely to work in the informal sector and be occupationally segregated, mostly taking jobs in domestic service, teaching and office work.

Women of similar age and educational credentials as their male peers earn 17 per cent less on average, according to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB); in some countries, this gap has increased in the past years. For professional women, there are fewer career prospects. There is

only one woman for every nine men in senior management positions in LAC, reports the IDB.


But women in the region demonstrate impressive entrepreneurship, more than in any other region of the world. At times this self-employment alternative is one for survival; in other instances it is a strategy to obtain a job that is reflective of their skills, or that allows them to have the necessary flexibility to meet family responsibilities. The subsistence trend is suggested in the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, which highlights that in LAC, women's entrepreneurial activity is higher in countries with low and medium incomes.

There remain many barriers to women's participation in the formal economy. These include limited access to credit, excessive red tape, and few policies and programs that support entrepreneurship. ECLAC research demonstrates that microfinance, networks and access to technology can facilitate entrepreneurial ventures and overcome the subsistence barrier to expand businesses. Countries of the region could better position themselves in access to credit, notably by developing the microfinance sector.

There is also a need for governments to continue to address gaps in knowledge and skills to make the most of the potential of female entrepreneurs. Social policies can offer avenues to harmonize paid work and family responsibilities, although ultimately public attitudes toward gender equality will be decisive.

More opportunities for youth em-

ployment are also needed. In the Caribbean, boys have lower educational attainment rates than girls do, and they are more likely to drop out. Throughout the region, violence disproportionately affects young men who are more likely to be victims of homicides. Offering positive alternatives for employment, such as including vocational training, if done properly, may go a long way to make education more relevant for boys and help contribute to a decline in youth violence. This would also ease the burden on families, especially women, who most often care for victims of violence.

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) released its Sustainable Economic Growth Strategy in October 2010. The promotion of gender equality is an integral part of the strategy. The new CIDA focus on growth combined with traditional efforts in promoting gender equality offer a unique opportunity for Canadians to dedicate their efforts in this area. 

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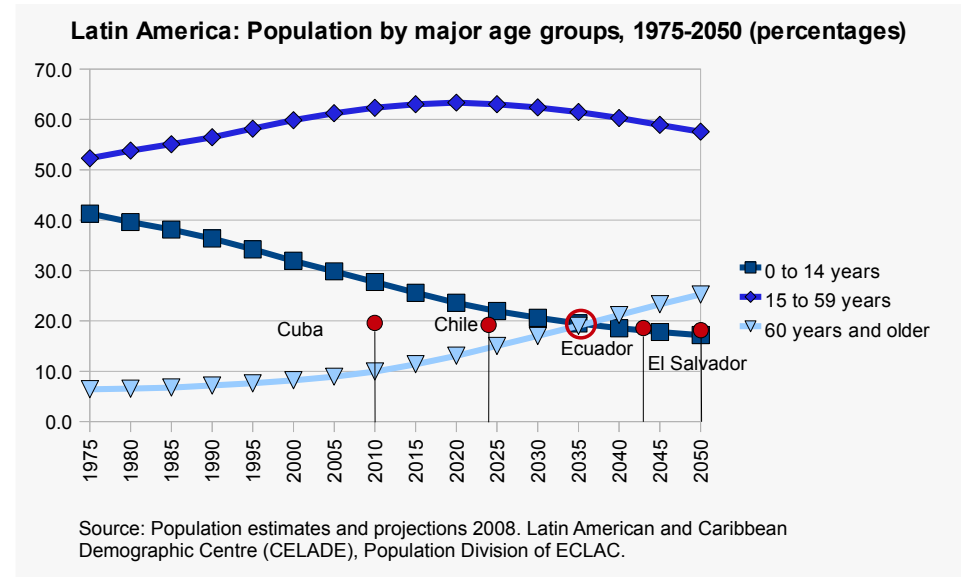
Labour markets, household work and the care crisis

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jobs in the informal sector both because of difficulties finding formal-sector jobs and because such jobs offer greater flexibility for undertaking family responsibilities. While the absence of set hours and other characteristics of informal-sector job work-sites allow women to perform paid work and fulfill family responsibilities such as care-giving and domestic work, informal work often leads women to a dead end, characterized by poor-quality jobs without social protection.

Unpaid work and care-giving in the household show significant differences by gender. While in general women worldwide devote more time to care-giving than men, the gap is noticeably wider in developing countries. In Latin America, women's time devoted to care-giving is nearly four times higher than Sweden and double the figure for Spain and Italy. In Mexico, for example, in 2002 females devoted an average of 13 hours per week to childcare and support for other household members, while males devoted seven hours. As reported in the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) report *Women's Contribution to Equality in Latin America and the Caribbean*, the gap was equally large with regard to care for individuals with physical limitations: 10 hours per week for females versus five hours for males.

Time-use surveys for five Latin American countries —although not strictly comparable— show that the gap in household work between males and females is greater at younger ages. It remains relatively unchanged up to age 49 in some countries and



then narrows at more advanced ages. Further, the number of hours that females devote to unpaid work and care-giving is greater in the poorer quintiles, whereas there is relatively little difference among males, regardless of income. The gender gap is less pronounced among females in higher socioeconomic brackets, although females in all socioeconomic quintiles spend more time than males on unpaid work.

Unless action is taken, the additional pressure of population ageing and rising demand of people requiring care at home will lead to an even worse care crisis and, as evidence shows, with even greater responsibilities falling on women.

The demographic transition under way in Latin America and the Caribbean reveals that the region's population is gradually but inexorably ageing. This is a generalized process, in which all the countries are advancing toward the "graying" of their societies. As shown in Figure 1, the most significant transformation occurs at both age extremes: the portion of the population under 15 will


diminish and the population over 60 will gradually increase, crossing in 2035, when both groups will near 20 per cent of the population. For its part the relative proportion of the 15 to 59 age group will remain stable at levels near 60 percent, even as this group grows older internally. As we can see, the transformation will not happen at the same time for all countries. We can expect this shift to occur in Cuba in 2010 and in Chile in 2024. Countries less advanced in this generational shift, such as Ecuador and El Salvador, will experience this cross-over of age groups after 2035.

Notwithstanding this heterogeneity in the majority of countries, there is a window of opportunity to undertake institutional, programmatic and practical transformations, which would not only bring about age-specific structural changes, but also modifications in sectoral demands.

The worsening care situation calls for a reform of social protection systems and of labour practices and a transformation of cultural norms that sanction an unequal distribution of paid and unpaid work be-

tween women and men. This in turn calls for efforts to institute universal care systems and implement government regulations and incentives that will recognize and encourage the reorganization and sharing of paid and unpaid work between women and men. A key challenge is to redistribute unpaid work through policies that facilitate men's participation in care-giving —parental leave, universal childcare or flexible schedules.

Public agendas in Latin America are only just beginning to explicitly consider care-related issues, though with wide differences across countries. Issues to be addressed include how to ensure universal and equal access to care, how to improve the quality of care and how to guarantee long-term sustainability. In other words, countries will have to consider building a social protection framework to properly meet the continuously expanding care needs of the future; this task will only grow more difficult with time.

In ECLAC's view it is key to include care issues in the social protection debate. Social protection schemes must provide greater equality of access for people in need of care, regardless of their resources, include universal and needs-based services, and take into account intergenerational solidarity. Finally, gender considerations need to be reflected in policies and programs. This means involving both men and women in support tasks and finding ways to enable them to reconcile family life with paid work. 

Inés Bustillo is Director of the Washington Office of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. This article is based on ECLAC's Social Panorama of Latin America, 2009.

La microfinance, un outil pour améliorer la situation des femmes en Haïti

Anne Gaboury

(English translation follows)

Les services financiers contribuent à leur autonomisation.

Le 25 octobre 2010, la Ministre canadienne de la coopération internationale Beverley J. Oda dévoilait la Stratégie sur la croissance économique durable de l'Agence canadienne de développement international (ACDI). Pour aider les pays en développement à réduire la pauvreté, le gouvernement canadien entend notamment soutenir davantage le développement et la croissance des micro, petites et moyennes entreprises du secteur privé, en accordant une attention particulière aux entreprises gérées par des femmes, et renforcer les produits et services des institutions financières en plus d'accroître leur disponibilité. Il s'agit d'un engagement qui s'appuiera entre autres sur la microfinance et qui contribuera assurément à l'autonomisation et au bien-être économique des femmes haïtiennes, dont la vulnérabilité financière s'est accrue depuis le séisme de janvier 2010.

La microfinance au service des populations pauvres

Nul doute que l'amélioration de l'accès et de la diversité des services financiers est un stimulant important du développement du secteur privé des pays en développement. Outre l'accès immédiat aux services d'épargne et de crédit, il existe d'autres contributions importantes pour soutenir le développement du secteur privé. Citons-en quelques unes : le renforcement du secteur de la microfinance et de ses opérateurs,

l'automatisation des opérations pour accroître la portée des institutions et restreindre les coûts d'accès et également le déploiement du financement à la petite entreprise agricole.

Au-delà de ces outils pour favoriser l'accès des populations pauvres aux services financiers, la croissance économique des pays en développement ne pourrait se faire sans apporter une attention soutenue au développement économique des femmes. Les femmes des pays en développement font face à plusieurs difficultés pour assurer leur bien-être économique. Parmi les plus importantes, l'accès limité aux biens et ressources productives et à la formation nécessaire pour leur mise en valeur ainsi que l'inégalité de la répartition de la responsabilité économique, les femmes assumant un rôle prépondérant dans la prise en charge du foyer. Enfin, les femmes ne possèdent souvent pas un pouvoir économique ou politique équivalent à l'importance de leur contribution tant du point de vue de l'affectation que de l'utilisation des ressources.

Vulnérabilité financière des femmes haïtiennes

Dans les Amériques, la vulnérabilité financière des femmes est probablement la plus aigüe en Haïti. Avec un indice de développement humain le plaçant au 149^e rang sur 182 pays, Haïti est le pays le plus pauvre de la région. Avant le séisme du 12 janvier 2010, 80 pour cent

des Haïtiens vivaient sous le seuil de la pauvreté. Évidemment, la situation s'est détériorée à la suite du séisme : le pays aurait connu une chute de l'activité de 80 pour cent dans les semaines qui ont suivi, provoquant une hausse du taux de chômage, qui s'affichait déjà à 65 pour cent avant le tremblement de terre.

L'impact économique du séisme s'est cruellement fait ressentir auprès de la population féminine, les femmes haïtiennes étant financièrement beaucoup plus vulnérables que les hommes. Sur le plan économique, les femmes occupent la majorité des emplois informels et précaires du petit commerce en Haïti. Sur le plan familial, la proportion de ménages défavorisés qui ont des femmes comme chefs de famille s'élève à 39 pour cent. Face à la stagnation de l'économie et au manque d'opportunités d'emplois rémunérateurs pour les femmes, une situation exacerbée par le tremblement de terre de janvier 2010, certains n'hésitent pas à qualifier la situation en Haïti de féminisation de la pauvreté.

Le rôle de la fédération des caisses populaires haïtiennes Le Levier

Les institutions de microfinance (IMF) développent depuis plusieurs années des produits novateurs afin de favoriser la pleine intégration économique des femmes. En guise d'exemple, Développement international Desjardins (DID), une composante du Mouvement Desjardins, le plus grand groupe financier coopératif au Canada, appuie depuis 40 ans la création, le développement et le renforcement d'institutions financières dans plusieurs pays en développement. DID soutient aujourd'hui des partenaires coopé-

ratifs qui joignent plus de 6 millions de membres et clients dont près du tiers (32,6 pour cent) sont des femmes. Ce sont donc plus de 2 millions de femmes qui peuvent ainsi avoir accès à des services financiers grâce à l'appui de DID.

Dans le paysage financier de la microfinance en Haïti, la fédération des caisses populaires haïtiennes Le Levier, un partenaire de longue date de DID, est l'institution financière dominante. Le Levier regroupe 50 caisses populaires et 24 points de services additionnels. Réparties dans l'ensemble du pays, ces caisses fournissent des services d'épargne et de crédit à leurs quelque 363 000 membres, avec des retombées indirectes auprès de 1,5 million de personnes. En juin 2010, le réseau comptait 147 000 femmes membres.

Les services d'épargne, de crédit et de transferts de fonds offerts par Le Levier contribuent à l'amélioration de la situation économique des femmes haïtiennes et à leur autonomisation. Les progrès, bien que modestes, sont néanmoins réels, comme en témoigne Génia Patrice, commerçante et membre de la caisse populaire de Kotelam (Pétion-Ville) depuis plusieurs années. Patrice souligne que la caisse a contribué à réduire sa vulnérabilité en lui permettant de faire des réserves pour les moments difficiles. Elle qui gardait autrefois ses économies dans une armoire à la maison, s'exposant à des vols fréquents, a placé tous ses avoirs à la caisse où son argent génère maintenant des intérêts en toute sécurité. De plus, elle souligne que le recours avisé au crédit lui a permis de saisir des occasions d'affaires qui lui auraient sinon échappées, faute de moyens.

La microfinance en Haïti permet

ainsi aux femmes, souvent pauvres parmi les pauvres, d'améliorer leur situation et de mieux prendre en mains leur développement et leur bien-être économiques. La microfinance, à sa mesure, permet non seulement d'espérer mais de préparer un avenir meilleur pour les femmes entrepreneures ou les chefs de famille mais également pour les jeunes filles. Par exemple, en Haïti, le crédit scolaire permet aux enfants issus de familles défavorisées d'accéder à l'éducation par le biais de prêts destinés à payer les frais de scolarité à temps. À la rentrée 2009, huit caisses populaires haïtiennes offraient ce produit de financement et 27 écoles participaient au programme, permettant à des centaines de jeunes filles de fréquenter l'école.

Bien entendu, il ne faudrait pas croire, loin s'en faut, que la microfinance est une panacée qui peut régler tous les problèmes des pays en développement. La microfinance ne pourra atteindre efficacement son objectif, assurer le développement des pays les moins favorisés grâce à un accès aux services financiers de base, qu'en complémentarité avec des politiques et des infrastructures adéquates et une volonté réelle et un engagement ferme de la part des États, tant ceux qui bénéficient de l'aide internationale que ceux qui la versent, de collaborer pour améliorer le sort des populations défavorisées. 

Anne Gaboury est Présidente-directrice générale de Développement international Desjardins.

Reports

Study underscores inequality for Afro-descendant and indigenous populations

A report entitled *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous People 2010* has found that many Afro-descendant and indigenous populations in the Americas continue to face major inequalities, including in the area of economic opportunities.

The situation has been compounded by the drop in remittances that accompanied the global economic meltdown. The decline in remittances had marked effects on indigenous and afro-descendant populations that were largely dependent on this source of income to remain above the poverty line.

Further, numerous natural catastrophes including heavy rains, landslides and droughts in many countries took their toll on these marginalized populations who often live in precarious settlements or off the land.

Within Latin America, the report examined the situation in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Honduras and Peru. Brazil's situation paints a particularly dire picture: of its 90 million Afro-Brazilians, many are poor. They live in poor health and have difficulty accessing education. Thus they constitute only a small percentage of the professional middle and upper classes. Recently, the Government of Brazil has made efforts to curb the inequalities of employment and education, including through affirmative action measures. But many still question the effectiveness of the policy.

Microfinance: A tool for improving the situation of women in Haiti

Anne Gaboury

Access to financial services will be key to their empowerment.

On Oct. 25, 2010, Canada's minister of international co-operation, Beverley J. Oda, announced the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) *Sustainable Economic Growth Strategy*. In order to help developing countries reduce poverty, the Canadian government intends to strengthen support for the development and growth of micro, small and medium-sized private-sector businesses with a special emphasis on those managed by women. The government also intends to strengthen products and services offered by financial institutions, as well as increase their availability. Microfinance will be an integral component of this strategy and will certainly contribute to the empowerment and financial well-being of Haitian women, whose financial vulnerability has increased since the January 2010 earthquake.

Microfinance: Serving the poorest

Without a doubt, improving access to financial services and increasing their diversity is a significant means of stimulating the private sector in developing countries. In addition to the provision of immediate access to savings and credit services, there are other effective ways of supporting private sector development. The following are but a few examples: strengthen-

ing the microfinance sector and its operators, automating operations to extend the reach of institutions and limit access fees, and deploying funding to small agricultural businesses.

Aside from these tools, which help the poor access financial services, the economic growth of developing countries is not possible without providing specific support to promote the economic development of women. Women in developing countries face several challenges in securing their economic well-being. The most important of these include limited access to goods and productive resources, and to training necessary for their proper utilization, as well as the inequality of the distribution of economic responsibility, as women assume a preponderant role in running a household. Finally, women often lack economic or political power equivalent to the importance of their contribution in funds or their use of resources.

The financial vulnerability of Haitian women

When compared to the financial vulnerability of women in other countries in the Americas, the situation is likely the most acute in Haiti. The country is the poorest in the region, ranking 149th out of 182 countries on the Human Development Index. Prior to the Jan. 12, 2010 earthquake, 80 per cent

of Haitians lived below the poverty line. Inevitably, the situation worsened following the disaster. Economic activity plummeted by 80 per cent in the weeks that followed, causing a rise in the unemployment rate, which already sat at 65 per cent before the earthquake hit.

The economic impact of the earthquake has had a devastating effect on the female population, as Haitian women are far more financially vulnerable than Haitian men. In the economic sphere, women occupy the majority of informal and precarious positions in the country's petty-trade sector. On a domestic level, 39 per cent of underprivileged households are headed by women. In the face of economic stagnation and a lack of well-paying jobs for women, some have qualified the situation in Haiti—exacerbated by the earthquake—as the feminization of poverty.

The role of the Haitian Federation of Credit Unions Le Levier

For several years, microfinance institutions (MFIs) have been developing innovative products to promote the full economic integration of women. For example, Développement international Desjardins (DID), a subsidiary of Desjardins—the largest co-operative financial group in Canada—, has been supporting the creation, development and strengthening of financial institutions in several developing countries for the past 40 years. Today, DID supports financial co-operative partners, serving more than six million members and clients, of whom nearly a third (32.6 per cent) are women. Thanks to the support of DID, more than


two million women now have access to financial services.

Within Haiti's financial landscape, the Federation of Haitian Credit Unions Le Levier—a long-standing partner of DID—is the country's dominant financial institution in terms of microfinance. Le Levier has 50 credit unions and 24 additional outlets located throughout the country. These credit unions offer savings and credit services to approximately 363,000 members, and indirectly benefit approximately 1.5 million individuals. In June 2010, 147,000 of the network's members were women.

The savings, credit and funds transfer services offered by Le Levier are contributing to the improvement of Haitian women's economic situation and to their empowerment. The progress made, although modest, is nonetheless tangible. Génia Patrice, merchant and member of the credit union in Kotelam (Pétion-Ville) for several years, can attest to this fact. Patrice says that the credit union has helped her become more financially stable, as she is able to put money aside for times of need. In the past, she would keep her savings in a cupboard at home, open to the risk of frequent theft. Since then, she has deposited all her assets in the credit union, where her money accumulates interest and is safe. In addition, Patrice states that the advised use of credit enabled her to seize business opportunities that would otherwise have been out of the question, due to insufficient funds.

In this way, microfinance enables Haitian women, often the poorest of the poor, to improve

their situation and take full control of their development and their financial well-being. Microfinance, in its own way, makes it possible not only to dream, but also to plan a better future for women entrepreneurs or heads of households. It is also helping to build a brighter future for girls. For example, in Haiti, school credit allows children from underprivileged families to have access to education through loans intended to help these families pay tuition fees on time. At the beginning of the 2009 academic year, eight Haitian credit unions offered this financing product and 27 schools participated in the program, enabling hundreds of girls to go to school.

Of course, it would be an exaggeration to believe that microfinance is a cure-all solution to solve all of the developing countries' problems. Microfinance alone cannot effectively accomplish its objective or ensure the development of the most underprivileged countries by providing access to basic financial services. These efforts must be complemented by adequate policies and infrastructures along with a genuine willingness and a firm commitment on the part of both beneficiary and donor countries of foreign aid, to co-operate in order to improve the future of underprivileged people. 

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Mujeres peruanas y microempresas

Janina V. León

(English translation follows)

Políticas públicas podrían fortalecer sus capacidades productivas a fin de generar mayor ingresos para las mujeres.

Perú ha sido identificado como ícono del crecimiento económico entre los países en desarrollo, pese a la reciente crisis internacional: entre 2000 y 2010 su producto bruto ha crecido sostenidamente en más de cinco por ciento por año. El reporte *Doing Business 2010* del Banco Mundial ubica al país en el puesto 36 a nivel mundial y segundo en América Latina porque su ambiente regulatorio vigente favorece a la apertura y operaciones de empresas. Además, según resultados de un estudio reciente de la investigadora Nora Lustig para la región latinoamericana, la desigualdad de ingresos en Perú, entre otros países, se está reduciendo; ello va a la par con la reducción de la pobreza nacional reportada para los años recientes. Aun el desempleo es referido como continuamente bajo, alrededor de cinco por ciento. Frente a este contexto macroeconómico promisorio, ¿cuánto de estas ganancias del crecimiento y menor pobreza han alcanzado específicamente a las mujeres que participan en la actividad económica?

Al 2008, de toda la oferta laboral peruana —unos 15 millones en una población total de 30 millones—, el 46 por ciento era femenina, según el Informe Anual 2008 “La mujer en el mercado laboral peruano” del Ministerio de Trabajo, en base a datos censales y de encuestas de hogares del Instituto Nacional de Estadística. En promedio, la edad de las trabajadoras es 40 años, su nivel

educativo es de primaria (con gran dispersión), y 30 por ciento de ellas son jefas de hogar, sean viudas, separadas o solteras. Prácticamente todas las trabajadoras están ocupadas, siendo mínimo el desempleo abierto, que afecta a las más jóvenes. Las trabajadoras se concentran en áreas urbanas, viviendo una de cada tres en Lima Metropolitana, una en alguna otra ciudad y una en el área rural.

¿Cómo se incorpora la mano de obra femenina en los mercados de trabajo? En principio es necesario destacar que hombres y mujeres comparten tendencias similares desde los años 1980s: al menos 45 por ciento han sido subempleados (con ingresos menores al mínimo legal), han trabajado en microempresas, sea por cuenta propia (casi 40 por ciento), como dueños (alrededor cinco por ciento), o como familiares no remunerados (15 por ciento). Entre trabajadoras, el subempleo ha sido superior (al menos 60 por ciento), con mayor participación en microempresas, sea por cuenta propia o como no remuneradas. También desde décadas atrás, se ha mantenido gran diferencia en el perfil de inserción laboral de las trabajadoras según localización, asociada a la naturaleza de sus actividades económicas. Al 2008, las trabajadoras rurales se desempeñaban masivamente como familiares no remuneradas (49 por ciento) o como dueñas (34 por ciento) de pequeñísimas unidades agrícolas, pecuarias o arte-


sanales. En tanto, las trabajadoras urbanas trabajan por cuenta propia (37 por ciento) o en alguna microempresa entre dos y nueve trabajadores (16 por ciento), sea como dueñas o asalariadas. Por tanto, el empleo de las trabajadoras peruanas sigue dependiendo en gran medida de la capacidad de microempresas rurales y urbanas para generar empleo e ingresos, según sus diferentes actividades, posibilidades de acumulación, tamaño de mercado, etc.

Por tanto, frente al contexto de expansión macroeconómica, en especial en las áreas urbanas modernas, parecen pocos los cambios en las condiciones laborales y de ingresos de las mujeres. Según el Informe Anual 2008 previamente referido, más del 50 por ciento de las mujeres siguen operando en microempresas, rurales o urbanas, trabajando en promedio 40 horas por semana, aunque con jornadas más largas en áreas urbanas. Por condiciones de contratación, predomina la informalidad: al menos 80 por ciento de las trabajadoras no están afiliadas a ningún sistema de pensiones, y más de la mitad, no están cubiertas por ningún seguro de salud. A ello podemos añadir las precarias condiciones técnicas y financieras de la mayoría de microempresas, con pocos años en el mercado, instaladas usualmente en una habitación de la vivienda propiedad de la trabajadora, salvo cuando ésta es ambulante, y operando en ramas de servicios personales y comercio minorista, con bajas ba-

rreras a la entrada y bajos retornos. De ahí que en su mayoría estas microempresas sean unidades de baja productividad y mínima escala de producción, con consecuentes bajos ingresos para su mano de obra. Los ingresos laborales de trabajadoras son reducidos —alrededor de US\$170 por mes—, y menores a los de sus pares masculinos que son más de US\$200 promedio.

Estos resultados estadísticamente representativos de las encuestas de hogares del Perú contrastan con casos exitosos de microempresas que en estos años han exportado sus productos. El documento “Handicraft Trade and Women Entrepreneurs - A Case Study in Lima”, elaborado en 2008 para el North-South Institute, encuentra peculiaridades de las microempresarias que exportan sus artesanías: ellas son mujeres adultas, con experiencia en su actividad, que conocen sus mercados locales y extranjeros, que se informan y capacitan por iniciativa propia. Ellas limitan su asociatividad y su endeudamiento por sus expectativas de crecimiento futuro, e involucran a sus parientes inmediatos en el negocio. En los casos estudiados, las microempresarias exportaban a través de terceros, asociaciones de exportadores u ONGs de comercio justo, por razones de confianza y escala, esperando hacerlo directamente en el futuro. Similares experiencias se reportan en ramas de confecciones y alimentos. Como se ve, hay espacio para que las políticas públicas y la cooperación fortalezcan la actividad de estas mujeres microempresarias exitosas.

Si la expansión macroeconómica ha favorecido significativamente poco a las microempresas, ¿qué opciones de políticas pueden ser

implementadas? Para fortalecer la capacidad productiva de las microempresas es necesario que se amplíe el acceso a servicios empresariales y de asistencia técnica. Recientemente el Perú ha sido premiado por su excelente desarrollo microfinanciero, que habrá redundado en favor de las microempresas. Menor ha sido la prioridad a políticas masivas de entrenamiento técnico, información, capacitación, formalización, que finalmente son decisivas para la competitividad de estos negocios. Como las microempresas de mujeres son las de menor escala e ingresos, las políticas de fortalecimiento empresarial y financiero las deben priorizar. Urge un conocimiento cabal y directo de las microempresas mismas; espere-mos que ello sea posible pronto con la nueva encuesta de microempresas que está recogiendo el Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas. Esta información puede contribuir a mejorar la investigación y elaborar propuestas de política orientados a mejorar sustancial y sostenidamente los ingresos y condiciones laborales en que se incorporan las mujeres peruanas en los mercados de trabajo. 

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Peruvian women and microenterprises

Janina V. León

Public policies could strengthen their productive capacity to generate higher incomes for women.

Despite the recent international economic crisis, Peru has been identified as an icon of economic growth among developing countries. From 2000 to 2010, Peru's gross domestic product has sustained a five per cent growth rate per year. In the World Bank's report *Doing Business 2010*, Peru places 36th worldwide and second in Latin America as its current regulatory environment favours opening and businesses' operations. Further, according to results from a recent study on the Latin American region by researcher Nora Lustig, there has been a reduction in income inequality in Peru among other countries. This is on a par with the reported reduction in Peru's national poverty level over recent years. Reports indicate that even unemployment in Peru remains at low levels, at roughly five per cent. Given this promising macroeconomic context, what portion of the gains in growth and reduction in poverty has reached the women who participate in Peru's economic activity?

Peru has a total population of 30 million with a labour force of 15 million. According to the Ministry of Labour's 2008 Annual Report “La mujer en el mercado laboral peruano,” data from the 2008 census and surveys of Peruvian households by the National Institute of Statistics suggests that 46 per cent of the labour force are women. On average, female workers are 40 years old with varied levels of primary education. Thirty per cent are

widowed, separated or single heads of households. Practically all of the female workers are employed; minimal open unemployment mainly affects the youngest workers. Female workers are concentrated in Peru's urban areas: one third live in metropolitan Lima, one third in other cities and one third in rural areas.


How is the female workforce incorporated into labour markets? First, it must be emphasized that since the 1980s, men and women have shared similar tendencies: at least 45 per cent of workers have been underemployed (with incomes lower than the legal minimum), and have worked in microenterprises, be it as independent workers (almost 40 per cent), as owners (roughly five per cent) or as unpaid family members (15 per cent). By contrast, among female workers at least 60 per cent have been underemployed and more have worked in microenterprises than have male workers, working as independent or as unpaid workers. Further, for decades there has existed a great difference in the work insertion profile of female workers depending on their location and the nature of their economic activities. In 2008, an overwhelming 49 per cent of rural female workers were unpaid family members and 34 per cent owned very small agricultural, cattle or handicraft businesses. Thirty-seven per cent of urban female workers are independent and 16 per cent are owners or salaried employees in microenterprises of between two and nine workers. Therefore, to a great extent the employment of female workers in Peru continues to depend on the ability of rural and urban microenterprises to generate employment and income in accordance with their different activities, possibilities of consolidation, market size, etc.

In a context of macroeconomic expansion, the changes in working conditions and income for women especially in modern urban areas appear limited. According to the aforementioned 2008 Annual Report, more than half of Peruvian women continue to work an average of 40 hours per week in rural and urban microenterprises, with longer work shifts in urban areas.

In Peru, informal employment predominates as a result of hiring conditions. As such, at least 80 per cent of female workers are not affiliated with any pension system and more than half are not covered by health insurance. Further, technical and financial conditions are precarious for the majority of microenterprises with few years in the market; except in the case of itinerant workers, most microenterprises are set up in a room in the female worker's home to provide personal or retail services, which have low entrance barriers and low returns. The majority of these microenterprises have low productivity and minimal scales of production that result in low incomes for their employees. Female workers in Peru have low incomes of roughly US\$170 per month; this is less than their male counterparts, who average US\$200.

These statistically representative results from surveys of Peruvian households contrast with some successful cases of microenterprises that exported their products during the same period. The document "Handicraft trade and women entrepreneurs: A case study in Lima, Peru" prepared in 2008 for the North-South Institute, finds unique characteristics in female entrepreneurs who export their handicraft: they are adult women with experience in their area of activity who know their market, local and foreign, and who

inform and train themselves under their own initiative. They limit their partnerships and debt to their expectations for future growth and include immediate relatives in the business. In the cases studied, the female entrepreneurs exported through a third party for reasons of confidence and scale, either with export associations or with fair trade NGOs, but hoped to export directly in the future. Similar experiences are reported in the clothing and food sectors. As can be seen, there is room for public policy and co-operation to strengthen the activities of these successful female entrepreneurs.

If macroeconomic expansion has not favoured significant numbers of microenterprises, what policy options could be implemented to do so? Access to business services and technical assistance must be expanded in order to strengthen the productive capacity of microenterprises. Peru was recently recognized for its excellent development of microfinance, which will benefit microenterprises. Less priority has been given to broad policies for technical training, information, education and registration that are ultimately decisive for the competitiveness of these businesses. Policies for strengthening businesses and finances should give priority to women's microenterprises since they have the lowest production scale and income. There is an urgent need for complete and direct knowledge of these microenterprises. We hope this will be possible soon with the data from the new survey of microenterprises that the National Institute of Statistics is gathering. This information can help to improve research and prepare policy proposals that focus on continuously and substantially improving the income and working conditions of female workers in Peru's labour market. 

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Venezuela: Violencia y efecto “crowding-out” de género

Natasha Morales E.

(English translation follows)

La violencia urbana que afecta principalmente a hombres jóvenes resulta indirectamente en el empobrecimiento de las mujeres jóvenes.

Reports

LAC countries improve gender equality ratings

The United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) Human Development Report 2010, launched on Nov. 4, 2010 illustrated progress in achieving universal education, raising life expectancy and moving toward gender equality in Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries.

UNDP introduced an innovative and improved measurement: the Gender Inequality Index. The new criterion measures inequality between women and men in three areas: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market.

In the Gender Inequality Index ranking, the countries in the Americas tend to place in the high to medium level. Canada is leading the region, placing at 16, followed by the United States at 37 out of a total of 136 countries. In LAC, Cuba, Costa Rica and Chile rank the highest at 47, 51 and 53 respectively, while Guatemala, Honduras and Haiti rank the lowest.

In the LAC labour market, the average female participation is 55.3 per cent while it stands at 83.3 per cent for males. The average for OECD countries is 65.5 per cent for females and 80.1 per cent for males.

Cada semana en Caracas mueren entre 70 y 200 personas por actos violentos. Según datos oficiales de 2009, se estima que la tasa de homicidios en Venezuela es de aproximadamente 100 por cada 100,000 habitantes, siendo una de las tasas más elevadas de América Latina y del Caribe. El costo social no se divide por igual entre hombres y mujeres y su impacto en términos económicos se origina ampliamente en las relaciones de género y en el bono demográfico.

Sin embargo, otros índices de desarrollo son alentadores. Según el Informe Nacional de Venezuela sobre los Objetivos de Desarrollo del Milenio 2010, la desigualdad de ingresos ha disminuido considerablemente entre 1994 y 2009. Si bien existen muchas discrepancias en cuanto las estimaciones de la pobreza, los datos oficiales muestran una tendencia decreciente en los últimos 10 años.

¿Cómo se explica esta paradoja?, ¿puede un país tener resultados exitosos en materia social cuando la violencia impera en la sociedad? Los estudios que han tratado de explicar la relación entre pobreza y violencia no han encontrado evidencia que una disminución de la pobreza reduzca sistemáticamente los niveles de violencia. Pero sí se ha encontrado evidencia en la correlación entre la edad promedio de la población y la violencia.

Más de la mitad de la población venezolana —56 por ciento, según el

Instituto Nacional de Estadística— tiene menos de 30 años, y el grupo más grande de la población se encuentra entre cero y 15 años, es decir, Venezuela seguirá siendo joven por lo menos durante dos décadas más. Según el Mapa de Violencia de Julio J. Waiselfisz presentado en 2008, la mayoría de las víctimas y victimarios del país son jóvenes varones entre 15 y 30 años, y el número de víctimas es tres veces mayor en la población joven masculina que en el resto de la población. En este grupo de edad, el 16 por ciento de los jóvenes varones no estudia ni trabaja; este porcentaje es el más alto de la región. ¿A qué se dedican los jóvenes?

Dado el crecimiento demográfico y las características actuales de su estructura demográfica y del mercado laboral se puede pensar que la violencia urbana va a seguir incrementándose al mismo ritmo que el crecimiento de la población, siempre y cuando no se tomen medidas urgentes.

En 2009, hubo aproximadamente 50,000 heridos de bala, en su mayoría hombres jóvenes, donde más de la mitad quedaron discapacitados. ¿Quién se hace responsable del cuidado de estas personas? Las madres, hermanas, esposas, hijas, tías, en sí, las mujeres.

Así, en una sociedad androcéntrica donde se valora la competitividad y la agresividad masculina, el problema de la violencia sobrecarga y profundiza el tiempo de las mujeres en actividades de cuidado familiar que, por un lado,



Foto: Meridith Kohut

Familia y amigos velan la muerte de Yanil Alexander Cemeño Figueroa en su funeral en Caracas, Venezuela. Cermeño fue fatalmente disparado en Petare, y fue el cuarto hijo de su familia en ser asesinado.

pueden llegar a sustituir sus actividades laborales remuneradas y, por otro lado, sustituyen el rol del Estado en su responsabilidad frente al reconocimiento y la acción de la violencia urbana como un problema de salud pública.

Por otro lado, investigaciones del Fondo de Desarrollo de las Naciones Unidas para la Mujer (UNIFEM) de 2004 han encontrado evidencia que en países violentos la violencia doméstica es mayor y, viceversa. Las políticas públicas en la esfera privada son más difíciles de abordar, en una cultura machista las denuncias sobre violencia intrafamiliar son todavía tabúes, lo cual no permite tener una figura real sobre la magnitud del problema. A pesar de esto, se estima que seis de cada 10 mujeres venezolanas sufren algún tipo de violencia doméstica.

La violencia contra la mujer tiene consecuencias perversas en toda la sociedad. Varios estudios han demostrado que las mujeres víctimas de violencia tenían un mayor número de partos no deseados y de hijos muertos. También la Comisión Económica para América

Latina (CEPAL) ha producido evidencia en 2008 sobre el bajo peso al nacer, los partos prematuros y los abortos en estos casos de mujeres víctimas.

Según el Fondo de Población de las Naciones Unidas, Venezuela es el país con más embarazos adolescentes en la región, pero lo más preocupante aún es que entre 1990 y 2007 el porcentaje de embarazos en adolescentes ha aumentado en cuatro puntos. ¿Es la violencia urbana uno de los factores que incrementa el número de embarazos adolescentes?

Esta tendencia, está exacerbando el llamado “madresolterismo” o “madreviudismo”, en cuyo marco los varones no se responsabilizan por los hijos que procrean con mujeres adolescentes o simplemente fallecen a muy temprana edad. Esto aumenta la presión económica y de cuidado de los progenitores de las adolescentes, presionando todavía mucho más el ingreso de sus hogares.

En sí, la pérdida de vidas de miles de jóvenes venezolanos no solamente resulta en un detrimento de fuerza laboral joven, sino también tiene consecuencias perversas en el empobreci-

miento de las mujeres.

En base a cálculos de las encuestas de hogares, entre 1994 y 2007, la proporción de mujeres adolescentes (entre 13 y 19 años de edad) en hogares pobres ha aumentado en ocho por ciento; esto no ocurre con el resto de la población. Mientras el país en su conjunto muestra tendencias de reducción de la pobreza, las mujeres jóvenes se están empobreciendo.

Venezuela actualmente cuenta con una instancia gubernamental rectora de políticas para la equidad de género elevada al máximo nivel, el Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Mujer y la Igualdad de Género. Venezuela también asumió todos los compromisos internacionales para lograr la equidad de género. Esto muestra la voluntad política por avanzar en la equidad de género.

Sin embargo, la ineficiencia estatal para frenar el problema de la violencia urbana, así como la ausencia de políticas efectivas dirigidas hacia los jóvenes, podrían estar ampliando la brecha de equidad generando un efecto “crowding-out” de género, especialmente en las mujeres jóvenes y adolescentes, entendiendo que los esfuerzos de inversión social dirigidos hacia las mujeres y hacia los jóvenes se ven expulsados o reducidos al mínimo por el impacto que la violencia urbana tiene en la vida de las mujeres. 🌐

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Venezuela: Violence and the “crowding-out” effect for women

Natasha Morales E.

Urban violence in the country mostly affects young men, but it also impoverishes young women.

Every week in Caracas between 70 and 200 people die due to acts of violence. According to 2009 official data, it is estimated that the homicide rate in Venezuela is approximately 100 per 100,000 inhabitants, one of the highest rates in Latin America and the Caribbean. The social cost is not evenly divided between men and women and the economic impact originates broadly in gender relations and the demographic bonus.

However, other development indicators are encouraging. According to the Venezuelan National Report on the Millennium Development Goals 2010, income inequality decreased considerably between 1994 and 2010. Although there are many discrepancies with respect to poverty estimates, official data shows a downward trend over the last 10 years.

How can this paradox be explained? Can a country's social indicators be positive when violence reigns in society? Studies that have tried to explain the relationship between poverty and violence have not found any evidence that a decrease in poverty consistently reduces levels of violence. But evidence has been found to correlate the average age of the population and violence levels.

More than half of the population of Venezuela —56 per cent, according to the National Institute of Statistics— is less than 30 years old, and the largest population group is aged zero to 15 years. In other words, Venezuela will continue to be young for at least two more decades. According to Julio J. Waiselfisz's Map of Violence presented

in 2008, the majority of the victims and murderers in the country are young men between 15 and 30 years old, and the number of victims is three times greater in the young male population than in the rest of the population. In this age group, 16 per cent of young males neither study nor work; this percentage is the highest in the region. What do young people dedicate themselves to?

The rate of demographic growth and the present characteristics of the demographic structure and the labour market may lead one to believe that urban violence will continue to increase at the same rate as the growth in population if urgent measures are not taken.

In 2009 approximately 50,000 people suffered gunshot wounds, most of them young men, and more than half of them were left disabled. Who is responsible for caring for these people? Their mothers, sisters, wives, daughters, aunts—in other words, women.

Thus, in an androcentric society, where male competitiveness and aggression is valued, the problem of violence significantly increases the amount of time women must devote to the care of their families. This activity may, on the one hand, end up replacing their paid work activities and, on the other hand, may substitute the role of the state to recognize and accept responsibility for urban violence as a public health problem and take action against it.

In addition, research carried out by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in 2004

found evidence that in violent countries, domestic violence is greater and vice versa. Public policies in the private domain are more difficult to tackle. In a machista culture, reporting domestic violence is still taboo, resulting in an inaccurate picture of the magnitude of the problem. In spite of this, it is estimated that six out of every 10 Venezuelan women experience some type of domestic violence.

Violence against women has disastrous consequences throughout society. Several studies have shown that women who were victims of violence had a greater number of unwanted pregnancies and dead children. As well, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) produced evidence in 2008 of low birth weights, premature deliveries and abortions in the case of these victims.

According to the United Nations Population Fund, Venezuela is the country with the most adolescent pregnancies in the region. But the most worrisome statistic is that between 1990 and 2007, the percentage of adolescent pregnancies increased by four percentage points. Is urban violence one of the factors that increase the number of adolescent pregnancies?


This trend is exacerbating the so-called “single motherhood” or “widowed motherhood,” whereby men do not take responsibility for the children they create with adolescent women or die at a very young age. This places a greater economic burden and responsibility for care on the parents of the adolescents, and puts even more pres-

sure on household incomes.

In and of itself, the loss of life of thousands of young Venezuelans is not only detrimental to the young labour force, but also has negative consequences in terms of the impoverishment of women.

Based on calculations derived from household surveys, between 1994 and 2007, the proportion of adolescent women (between 13 and 19 years old) in poor households increased by eight per cent; this does not occur in the rest of the population. While in the country as a whole the trend shows a reduction in poverty, young women are becoming more impoverished.

Venezuela currently has a government body responsible for gender equality at the highest level, the Ministry of Popular Power for Women and Gender Equality (Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Mujer y la Igualdad de Género). Venezuela has also signed onto all the international commitments to achieve gender equality. This demonstrates the political will to progress in the area of gender equality.

However, inefficient government efforts to curb the problem of urban violence, as well as the absence of effective policies aimed at young people, could be widening the equality gap, generating a "crowding-out" effect of gender especially among young and adolescent women. This means that social investment efforts aimed at women and young girls are being eliminated or reduced to the minimum by the impact that urban violence has on the lives of women. 

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Reports

New operational policy for gender equality

In early November, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) approved a new operational policy targeted at direct strategic investments for gender equality and the participation of women in banking or business operations. To further inform this policy, the IDB in conjunction with other key organizations such as the Multilateral Investment Fund (MIF), the World Bank, and the Deutsche Gesellschaft Für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) held a forum in Lima on women's entrepreneurship later the same month. Studies on barriers faced by female entrepreneurs in Latin America and the Caribbean were unveiled at the event.

The main findings of the study "Women's Economic Opportunities in the Formal Private Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean" were related to the lack of training and access to networks and markets, as well as the continuation of traditional gender roles in the disproportionate assignment of domestic labour to women. The study included recommendations such as targeted labour market reforms to lessen the barriers that women face in business as well as the creation of services that facilitate access to business training and financial services.

These recommendations have been included in the IDB's new operational policy to promote gender equality.

Labour market, migration and economic growth in Chile

Marcelo Charlín

The sustainability of Chile's economic development is uncertain.

Media coverage of the 33 miners trapped underground after the collapse of a Chilean copper mine in August 2010 flooded the news for 80 days until they were finally rescued. In contrast, during the same period, no attention whatsoever was paid to the death of approximately 60 men and women due to labour accidents in Chile, at a rate of 1.5 persons per day, according to official figures. Some analysts estimate the actual rate to be twice as high, if counting those deceased as a consequence of labour-related illnesses not recognized as such by either health authorities or employers. Chile's economy has been growing at a fast pace, but how sustainable is its development if advances are made at the cost of precarious work conditions, notably among women?

Despite the fact that over the past two decades Chile has been making steady progress toward development, poverty and socio-economic inequality remain pervasive and much remains to be accomplished to better integrate minority groups into Chilean society. This is particularly noticeable when examining the labour conditions of women in the lower-income sectors, especially in two sensitive sectors: domestic service, in which almost all work-

ers are women, and agro-industry, in which women account for 76 per cent of the labour force, a quarter of whom are young and are heads of household.

Peruvian young migrant women have long been attracted by the growing demand for domestic labour that followed Chilean women's increased entry in the labour market. It is assumed in the contract, whether formal or informal, that a woman is endowed with a "natural" competence to take care of children, independent of age and socio-economic origin. Therefore, the care-taking function, defined as the main component of the job description, does not require any specialized training or specific skills on the part of the applicants. For the migrant woman, this type of work translates into having two families: the Chilean family by which she is hired and for which she will be subject to precarious and strenuous working conditions, and her own family back in Peru that awaits the remittances. Thus, Peruvian women employed as "nannies" take on two functions: the equivalent of a productive function in their home country since remittances are often the only source of income for their family, and a reproductive function by taking care of small children because they support their host family's endurance.

Other migration flows that follow the law of supply and demand in the labour market are linked to the emergent phenomenon of massive internal migration between regions of the country. Yet, because of considerable distances —roughly 3,000 kilometres separate Chile's North and South boundaries— Chilean migrants may not reach some particular regions' demand for labour

while their Peruvian counterparts can.


In the case of the agro-industrial sector, Chilean women move from one province to another with their family, either as head of household or following their husbands and joining the labour market in the destination region. In both cases these families normally have young children and settlement expectations. Given that the internal labour demand that they follow is centred on agriculture, involving both land and sea farming, they are exposed to unexpected risks such as production stoppages and massive unemployment.

A particularly dramatic case that illustrates this situation occurred in the salmon industry in the southern end of Chile, where families had been massively attracted by the labour demand of the salmon farms, leaving behind social and extended family networks to get precarious jobs; it is appalling that some women used diapers due to restrictions on the use of restroom facilities during working hours. The salmon industry underwent a crisis that reached its peak at the end of 2009: a viral infection caused the shutdown of the breeding farms and left almost 30,000 single-parent and nuclear families without resources to cover their basic needs. The consequences for women and children were not limited to the direct financial impact of unemployment. Small children often had to be left unattended at home, leading to child abuse and accidents in some instances, while some adolescents fell prey to drugs and prostitution. Also, given the massive number of resident migrants, the host region was not prepared to provide the required social

services —schooling, health care, public transportation, etc. Many families were left in despair.

According to some union leaders interviewed during fieldwork conducted in the aftermath of the salmon industry crisis early 2010, the shutdown of the farms was due to an environmental depletion allowed by managers and company owners blinded by immediate booming export returns. Salmon farming had grown to be the third-largest contributor to Chile's GDP until it fell victim to its own short-sightedness, namely its reliance on two main resources to produce high capital accumulation rates: the exploitation of labour and the depletion of environmental capacity to sustain the breeding.

The questions that remain open are to what extent is Chile's overall economic growth sustainable, and in what ways is the labour force affected by the economic growth strategy, especially women? The country's economy has boomed in a largely unregulated context, leaving the labour market and industry to operate freely, with no oversight or control by government agencies.

Both questions point to the issue of the sustainability of Chile's development in the long term, especially when one observes that social integration, inequality reduction and poverty alleviation lag significantly behind economic advances. 

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FOCAL will be launching a membership program later this month. As an individual member you would benefit from the wealth of information, activities and opportunities for dialogue with key opinion-makers that FOCAL offers, enjoy exclusive services and support a valued organization. Memberships are \$75/year for regular, \$45/year for young professionals and \$20/year for students, and these fees are tax deductible. Please check www.focal.ca for more information in the new year.

Canada-Mexico Initiative holds successful meeting in Veracruz

On Nov. 23, a group of more than 20 experts convened by the CMI—headed by Senator Rosario Green Macías and Honorable Bill Graham—met in Veracruz to discuss ideas linked to the movement of people, energy, subnational relations and the economy that could reinforce the bilateral relationship.

Policy Brief: The case for the Canada-Panama Free Trade Agreement

Carlo Dade, Marina Connors and Mark Richards

In May 2010, Canada signed the Canada-Panama FTA, its fifth with a Latin American country. Implementing the FTA would immediately eliminate nearly all tariffs, with the remainder lowered gradually. This competitive advantage will prove important given that Canada's biggest competitor in the Panamanian market is the U.S., whose own bilateral FTA with Panama is stalled. This policy brief is available both in English (<http://bit.ly/eKratm>) and in French (<http://bit.ly/gLRhLq>).

The Canadian Foundation for the Americas is an independent, non-partisan think tank dedicated to strengthening Canadian relations with Latin America and the Caribbean through policy dialogue and analysis. FOCALPoint helps us accomplish our mission as a monthly publication combining news and analysis that reaches decision-makers, civil society, private sector, academics and students with an interest in the region. Our goal is to bring together diverse perspectives to make FOCALPoint a dynamic analytical forum.

With the exception of FOCAL Views, which is the official institutional stance of FOCAL, the opinions and analysis in FOCALPoint are those of the author and do not reflect the institutional position of FOCAL, its staff or its board.

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