



Impacts of the Crisis on Women in Latin America

By Norma Sanchís and Alma Espino

2010 Edition

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The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) is an international, feminist, membership organization committed to achieving gender equality, sustainable development and women's human rights. AWID's mission is to strengthen the voice, impact and influence of women's rights advocates, organizations and movements internationally to effectively advance the rights of women.

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Introduction

The objective of this article is to review the visible impact of the systematic crisis we are experiencing on the situation of women in the region through a Latin American perspective. To this end, the situation of the economies and some of the signs of recovery are reviewed with attention paid to the differences among countries. Some of the gaps in the main labor market indicators are pointed out to the

degree these may give information about the economic position of women. Additionally, testimonials illustrating the crisis transfer channels to the weakest and most dependant economies are offered. Subsequently, the relationship between the economic and political situations and regional integration processes in this framework are discussed in order to pose a few recommendations at the conclusion.

The situation of the economies of the region: crisis and recovery

As the crisis that originated in the United States in 2008 was expanding to the global level, analysis of its potential impact on the Latin American region indicated its impact would be relatively reduced. In effect, in comparison with previous situations of a similar nature, the regional economy was showing a set of strengths. Among these strengths was sustained growth in the period of 2003-2007 that in the last year reached a figure of 5.7% and which was maintained in spite of a lesser rate in 2008 (4.5%). This

performance can be explained by three main factors: i) increase in international prices for raw materials, above all hydrocarbons, minerals and metals; ii) an abundant availability of external financing, liquidity and low interest rates for international financing; and, iii) increased remittances from migrants living in developed countries.

Additionally during this period of time, the governments tended toward implementing policies that accompanied the favorable

Footnotes

1 - The authors are part of the Latin American Chapter of the International Gender and Trade Network (IGTN).

international context achieving fiscal surplus, reducing external debt with regard to GDP, and increasing reserves, among others.

Employment and salaried work growth took place in this context along with improvements in labor conditions associated with the formal sector, a reduction of unemployment (7.5% on the regional average, more than three points below that of the beginning of the decade) and an increase in labor incomes. As a consequence of these improvements and an increase in social spending, a considerable reduction of poverty took place (34.1%) and extreme poverty (12.6%) measured up to 2007. (Espino and Sanchís, 2009)

The information available for 2009 indicates that the effects of the crisis on Latin America have been different from country to country and sub-regions. This diversity is explained by the characteristics of the respective productive structures, the way they relate economically with the world, as well as their political, economic and social institutionalism. Therefore, while different levels of growth can be seen in a group of countries, others experienced drops and, in some cases, of considerable magnitude.

According to estimates (ECLAC, 2010), in 2009 the GDP of Latin America fell 1.9% and the GDP per inhabitant, 3%. What must be taken into consideration, however, is that this average masks marked differences between groups of countries. South America showed a slightly downward evolution (-0.2%)²; in Central America GDP stayed relatively stable (0.3%) receiving the positive influence of the gradual recovery of the economy of the United States. The Caribbean showed a decreasing rate (-2.1%) due to the negative effect of the crisis on the tourism sector and on the external demand for raw materials. With the recovery begun in the United States, the demand for tourism, which would contribute

to the recovery of these countries, can be foreseen (ECLAC, 2010).

The fall in demand from developed economies and of the prices of some products led to an acute drop, on average, of the global exports of the region, in volume as well as value (9.5%). The greatest contraction in volumes exported was in Mexican exports (14.3%), followed by a reduction of around 6.5% in the countries of South America and close to 5% in the countries of Central America. Thus, the countries most dependant on foreign trade, and therefore to the situation of external markets, and with lesser geographic diversification of trade based on manufactured goods, grew the slowest. This was due to, on the one hand, greater vulnerability to the crisis and the slow recovery of the United States; and, on the other hand, the inability to compensate by placing exports in other destinations. The Mexican case is a good illustration of this pattern: its GDP fell 6.7% with a 14.3% reduction of traded volumes, affected by its strong ties to the economy of the United States, the destination of 80% of its exports.

Signs of positive evolution in almost all the economies of the region began to be observed in the second semester of 2009. With different degrees of dynamism these seemed to consolidate in 2010 amid projections of growth rates similar to those before the crisis began. In effect, in 2010 the regional GDP growth rate would be 5.2%. This performance can be explained by external and internal factors: among the former, the sustained demand for products from the region from some Asian countries, especially China, stands out, creating conditions for the recovery of prices and export volumes (above all commodities such as metals and minerals and certain grains in the case of South America). As mentioned, the gradual recovery of the economy of the United States contributed to a better scenario for Mexico, Central America, and to

Footnotes

2 - This percentage accounts for positive figures that go from 3.5% in Bolivia to 0.3% in Brazil; other countries showed negative rates, such as Paraguay, Venezuela, Chile, and Ecuador; in the case of Central America, the majority of the countries showed negative rates (Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica); positive rates could be seen in Guatemala (0.6%), Panama (2.4%) and the Dominican Republic (3.5%).

3 - Estadísticas de Género <http://www.cepal.org/mujer/> (Gender Statistics, ECLAC)

the degree the demand for tourism rises, possibly also for the Caribbean. Among the internal factors that stand out in terms of collaborating with the achievement of these results, is the capacity for countercy-

clical action carried out by several countries (fiscal and monetary policies). The magnitude to which these policies were deployed is related to what was accumulated in the phase prior to the rise in commodity

prices and, as also mentioned, the uninterrupted growth in the region, the reduction of external indebtedness levels, improvements in fiscal accounts and increases in international reserves (ECLAC, 2010).

Social and gender impacts of the crisis

If the region as a whole is considered, a relative increase of unemployment and informality, growth of poverty, extreme poverty and vulnerability can be seen. Likewise, a certain difficulty in maintaining the progressive trend social expenditures had been showing as well as greater survival risk for small productive units (ECLAC, 2009d). Aspects of these latter categories could bring about undesired consequences for the well-being of households, especially the poorer ones, which many times have women as heads of household.

The regional average shows that while the unemployment rate fell from 11% to 7.4% between 2004 and 2008, in 2009 it rose one percentage point with regard to the previous year, reaching 8.5%. Even though women continue experiencing much higher unemployment rates than men (10.1% and 7.5% respectively), during 2009 unemployment among men increased (1.2% over 2008) more appreciably than for women (0.8%). This is due to the contraction of employment in typically male activities, such as construction or manufacturing, in the majority of the countries (ILO, 2009).

Nonetheless, with regard to the social impacts of the global economic crisis, ECLAC points out that these are varied in intensity and very heterogeneous from one country to another. Thus, in Mexico, labor indicators continued deteriorating in 2009 as a consequence of the persistent drop in economic activity. In this country, the strong contraction of the manufacturing industry and

construction, as well as salaried jobs, was partially compensated by the generation of self-employment. Brazil, however, showed a growth in salaried jobs, and in spite of the drop in the manufacturing industry, maintained and increased employment in services and construction. At the other end of things, unemployment in Ecuador was somewhat above the regional average (8.7%), with greater growth among women. It must be said however, the informal sector and construction had greater influence on job creation than manufacturing or commerce in this country.

How are women affected, and what are the factors influencing this?

The differences noted on the social indicators were also seen with regard to the impact on the situation of women. The characteristics of said impacts are measured by a set of factors linked to women's placement in the labor markets and associated to behaviors derived from gender constructions.

The characteristics and magnitude of the impacts of the economic processes on women correspond to the way they participate in work and employment: what is the proportion of economically "inactive" women (housewives), the unemployed, the employed, in what branches of activity are they, and in which categories of employment (salaried, self-employed, others), etc.? The institutional context relat-

ed to social security and legislated labor safeguards and the degree of enforcement also influence the effects of these processes. That is, the effects of the crisis then would be relatively different for men and women, and among women, depending on the characteristics of the economies, as well as the configuration of the gender of work and the labor markets, and of the institutional nature of labor and social security.

Paid and unpaid work in the household

A large percentage of working women produce goods and services in their homes and are not compensated. According to ECLAC data, the proportion of women dedicated exclusively to household tasks over the total female population 15 years of age and older goes from 20.1% in Chile, up to 37% in Mexico. These percentages are higher when taking into account for calculation purposes the position of relationships of women in the case of spouses and the existence and number of minors under six years of age present in the households³.

The drop in male employment as a consequence of the crisis tended to foster the participation of women, which resulted in countercyclical behavior. This behavior of women—above all those in the lowest income quintiles—responds to the need to lessen uncertainty in their homes in view of the male head of household's job instability. What can also happen

is discouragement in the search for employment in an adverse context. In this case the supply side of women contracts and the unemployment rate for women is reduced or stays the same. In the case of Brazil, for example, male unemployment rose (due to a reduction in activity in the manufacturing industry, as mentioned) and female unemployment stayed relatively stable, as did economic participation and the employment rate. This may be because women were able to keep their jobs (probably due to the dynamism of services), while at the same time there was no increase in their labor supply. In Uruguay, with a clearly differentiated behavior, unemployment rates fell in spite of increased activity rates (more people trying to find jobs) as a consequence of an increase in the proportion of those working in both genders, (new jobs were created) (ILO, 2009).

In other words, economies can be seen behaving differently and differences may occur in the strategies of women and the households vis-à-vis situations of crisis (or even economic booms). The combination of these factors contributes to the configuration of the impacts of the crisis seen empirically.

Deterioration in employment or increase in unemployment, with the subsequent decrease to household income, promotes the supply of female labor but without diminishing the burden of caretaking responsibilities, which increases the total amount of work time for women.

Women's access to the labor market and to their own income, is one way of extenuating the situation of poverty; important in two-parent homes, but crucial in poorer homes headed by a woman. But it is precisely the sectors with the greatest incidence of poverty that have greater demands

for caretaking and non-compensated work by women due to the greater number of children and the lesser capacity to access certain basic services in the market, in the absence of public supply. Going into the labor market under these conditions has a perverse effect that many times pushes women into informal work. In effect, the informality of women's work is explained by insufficient creation of formal employment, but also by the flexibility informal employment gives women to contend with family responsibilities. Formal employment presents obstacles that are difficult to overcome by not recognizing the burdens on women's time and cyclical ones: the reproductive burden, the burden of non-compensated work, and the burden of caretaking for dependants in general (ECLAC 2009d).

Social protection in Latin America is fundamentally borne by the families, resting on the gender-based division of labor that assigns an overload of caretaking to women in order to guarantee personal and social survival. As a rule, the States of the region do not include the dimensions of caretaking on their agendas and policy decisions and this constitutes a strong limiting factor on women's partici-

pation in economic activities. At times of crisis, this absence of public policies can aggravate the situation of women because of the work overload, their precarious labor situation, and the lack of access to services that satisfy basic caretaking needs.

Along these lines, the way demands for caregiving are resolved are decisive for a better or worse handling of situations of crisis, and more generally, constitute a powerful instrument of social and economic stratification.

Impacts in the labor market

With regard to the impacts seen on the labor market, these can arise out of the loss of jobs as well as through deterioration in the quality of the jobs. The drop in formal salaried jobs drove the search for opportunities in informal companies and in self-employment. These segments of work absorb proportionally more women: while 57.1% of Latin American women are in precarious jobs in the informal sector, the proportion lowers to 51% for men. Women, additionally, are the majority in low productivity self-employment work or in domestic services, where nine out of ten do not have access to social security.

In the case of Mexico, even though global unemployment rose, it grew in greater proportion among men. But, at the same time, employment was found in situations of greater precariousness, increasing the proportion of workers with no access to health care systems. With the increase in unemployment and considering the structural biases toward women entering the work force in highly informal sectors, such as self-employment, domestic services and social services, personal and communal, the impact of greater precariousness on them has probably been of considerable magnitude.

"A few years ago I was better off; I earned enough to send to my children. But now I had to bring them because my mother can't take care of them any more, she is sick, she is older, and things are not going well in Paraguay and whenever I can, I try to help out. And my sister came too with the two youngest ones, all to my house. She helps a bit, does some by-the-hour work, but it seems everyone depends on me, I seem to be everybody's mother..."

Migrant domestic worker in Argentina.

A closer look at the economies and gender impacts

As mentioned, the differences in gender impacts per country arise from several factors. They are, in particular, closely related to the crisis transmission channels of each country. In countries such as Mexico and those of Central America where the maquila industry is considerable, with a significant demand for women workers, a contraction of the sector was seen due to inverse migration to other regions. Even though it was a process that was already taking place, the crisis clearly deepened this trend, reducing work opportunities for women. In Mexico, in spite of the marked de-feminization trend of maquila over the last few years, women constituted 54% of non-specialized personnel in 2004.

The labor problems of the developed economies have had consequences for the economies of the region through an additional two channels: i) forcing migrants to return, which increases pressure on the local labor market, and, ii) bringing on a drop in remittances, a phenomenon that is very important for some countries of the region.

With regard to the first aspect, the greatest impact on women is associated with the tendency of the feminization of migration in recent years. This phenomenon had its roots in the social reproduction crisis in the countries of origin that drove women to cross borders in search of resources to sustain their families, and in the service sector labor opportunities which the caregiving crisis in the countries of destination brought about (Pérez Orozco, 2009). These opportunities began to contract with the crisis, forcing some migrants, men and women, to return.

The closing of the maquilas

Castillo, 32 years of age and the mother of two, is one of the more than 27,000 workers laid off in the last triennium by companies operating in the Duty Free Zone of Nicaragua, and calculations set the figure at 30,000 by the end of 2009, according to Sandra Ramos in conversation with IPS. She is the Executive Director of the non-governmental *Movimiento de Mujeres Trabajadoras y Desempleadas "María Elena Cuadra"* (the "María Elena Cuadra" Movement of Unemployed and Working Women).

In April, the organization determined that in Nicaragua, the women's work force has been the hardest hit by the global financial debacle. This was the conclusion of a study called "*Comportamiento del empleo en las empresas textil-vestuario de las zonas francas frente a la crisis económica y el impacto en la vida de las mujeres*". (The Behavior of employment in the textile-garment companies of the duty free zones vis-à-vis the economic crisis and the impact on the lives of women.)

From the end of 2006 and the beginning of 2009, 29 maquila companies shut down totally or partially and since 2008 more than 25,000 jobs were lost in the sector. Of this total, 85% of the jobs destroyed corresponded to women's jobs, explained Ramos. Even worse, 38 percent of them were single mothers and close to 70% were heads of household. [...]

Unprotected women

Evelyn Flores, of the non-governmental *Fundación Puntos de Encuentro*, denounced that the State is not protecting the conditions and rights of women in the maquila industry at a time of mass layoffs where they are the ones most affected. There are no State employment policies for women and they have always accepted precarious jobs because of the lack of options and because they are heads of household. The result is work without the right to social security, long working hours and lack of respect for the working conditions of women."

Source: <http://www.radiolaprimerisima.com/noticias/general/54381>
June 2009

The reduction of the amount of money sent by both men and women migrants to their homes of origin significantly affected several economies of Central America and the Caribbean (ILO, 2009). Up to the third quarter of 2009, annual reductions close to 10% took place in some countries such as El Salvador and Guatemala. In October of the same year, remittances in Mexico had been falling for 12 consecutive

months, with a regression of 16.0% annually, while in Colombia, the drop was 14.3% in the first six months of 2009. Decreased remittances can negatively affect the incomes of households, and especially the poorest households and those headed by women, where this money is earmarked for daily expenditures on food, clothing and education, expenditures mainly made by women.

The impact of remittances

The Remesas.org report, which outlines economic aspects of the Bolivian diaspora, clearly shows this country's heavy dependency on remittances from women migrants in Spain. The study says Bolivia is a "unique and extremely outstanding case of macroeconomic dependence on transfers from women, whose extraordinary significance requires a detailed analysis of their effects." [...]

Crisis accentuates feminization of migration

A study of the labor market in Spain carried out by Rojas shows

that women migrants have an easier time finding work, because of the lower skill levels that are required in jobs that typically go to women migrants, and the lower wages they are paid.

Bolivian women in Spain work mainly as caretakers for the elderly or children, or as domestics – jobs that do not require special training or skills; "demand that offers opportunities for women, not men," Rojas explained.

Since 2008, male migrants have been hit hard by massive dismissals in Spain caused by the crisis, while women have generally held on to their jobs. As a result, men are returning in greater numbers from that country, expelled by the

global economic crisis, said Rojas. [...]

The researcher mentioned an even more disturbing effect of migration: when they go abroad, women often leave behind children, in the care of their fathers or other family members.

The result, he said "is a very serious breakdown of the family."

Source: Franz Chavez. BOLIVIA: Women's Remittances Come at High Cost. IOM Gender and Migration News. Issue 35, July 2010.

http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/published_docs/periodicals_and_newsletters/gender_bulletin.pdf

Government responses

Depending on the magnitude of the effects expected from the crisis in each country, as well as the availability of resources to carry out the initiatives, the governments of the region looked toward restoring confidence of the agents and getting the financial markets operating on the one hand, and on the other, to supporting aggregate demand.

Along these lines, the central banks endeavored to give liquidity to the financial systems in order to facilitate local credit markets or granted resources for financing, where there were more difficulties to obtaining it. Nevertheless, these policies –greater liquidity, reduction of interest rates– even when successfully implemented, do not guarantee an increase in the supply of loans, or an increase in the demand for goods. The contraction of private loans could not be completely compensated by greater activity of the public banking sector (in many cases part of the countercyclical strategy) to counter the restric-

tive behavior of the private banks. (ECLAC 2009c).

Public consumption was the only component of demand that grew at the beginning of 2009. This was due to the fact that many countries of the region implemented countercyclical policies that contributed to accelerating the process of recovery in the second semester.

Fiscal policy, on the expenditure side (direct increase of demand), as well as taxes (increase of disposable income), is very important in this type of situation in order to accompany monetary policy. In the majority of the countries both types of measures were resorted to by reducing or exonerating taxes for diverse activities, granting subsidies, investment in infrastructure and public works. In several countries, monetary transfers to the most vulnerable sectors were maintained, in some this was expanded⁴ and in others new instruments with distributive impact were created.⁵ In the

first months of 2009, a significant increase of current expenditures and to a lesser degree, capital expenditure was seen.⁶ (ECLAC, 2009c).

In general, the countries of the region implemented countercyclical measures in the socio-economic arena in spite of the complex scenario posed by the crisis. Nevertheless, the complex articulation between the State, the market and the families for providing caregiving services continues to be skirted, and in crisis circumstances, this favors the tendency toward vulnerability and exclusion (ECLAC, 2009d). In this dynamic, the greatest disservice is to the poorest women, disproportionately overburdened by the double work load, and with fewer possibilities for entering the labor market. This constitutes a core link to the reproduction of poverty and inequality. The universality of caretaking services that strengthen and give homogeneity to social protection services is therefore posed as a challenge.

Repercussions of the crisis on democratic governability

The sustained growth of the economies and in employment in the five-year period prior to the crisis enabled millions of Latin Americans to break out of poverty: in 2002, the population living in poverty was 221 million, and in 2008, it was 180 million.⁷ But the threat of regressing to that situation as a result of the international crisis opens the way for certain levels of political instability. Unequal distribution is accompanied by manifest imbalances in the negative impacts of the crisis, with consequences of tension in the political system and difficulties for the consolidation of the Rule of Law.

In spite of the attachment to the democratic system seen over the last two decades, there are institutional weaknesses that pose barriers to the effective exercise of rights for a good part of the population and lays bare that the law is not equally enforced. This social fragmentation intensifies situations of conflict and is the breeding ground for violence and organized crime (Rojas Aravena, 2009). It also weakens democracies, favors political tension and polarization, and propitiates greater permissiveness for non-democratic proposals.

The economic crisis and the social tension it brings, require strengthening and reconstructing State competences that were devalued and corroded by two decades of neoliberalism. The demands made on the State are intensifying in the context of the electoral cycle of change of Presidents that ten countries of the region are going through here at the end of the decade. The expectations and aspirations derived from the successful performance of the

economies in the five-year period of 2003–2007, could give way to levels of dissatisfaction and put at risk the space that has been won over the last few years by progressive governments and unorthodox economic policies.

But, its not just about the nations as States. The regional integration processes underway could become tense if the struggle for particular interests grows, in spite of the growing recognition of the potential regional consensus has for confronting the crisis.

Nevertheless, the conflicts and tensions coexist with the process of strengthening integration initiatives, particularly that of UNASUR, the Union of South American Nations. It has the strategic potential of establishing itself as the fourth largest economic macro-region of the planet considering its territorial and demographic extension together with the natural resources of South America.

Confronting the tensions of democratic governability in Latin America requires establishing unorthodox policies capable of overcoming the fragmenting effects of neoliberal policies and the impacts of the economic crisis. To this end, there is a need to preserve arenas for debate and channels to express conflicts, and strengthen politics to generate alternatives that enable recovery of consensus and trust. These consensus must include, explicitly and decidedly, women and their interests, and gather the contributions and proposals put forth by feminist and women's organizations with a gender equality orientation as one of the main assets for confronting the crisis.

Footnotes

4 - The primary balance went from a positive level equivalent to 1.4% of GDP in 2008 to an estimated primary deficit for the year of 1% of GDP. Public revenues were affected by the evolution of the level of activity and the prices of export commodities.

5 - For example Paraguay, expansion of the conditional transfer program to benefit 120,000 families

6 - For example, the Universal Allocation per Child in Argentina (*Asignación Universal por Hijo/a*), which grants coverage to almost 5 million minors (under 18 years of age) in the care of their parents who did not get the benefits of Family Allocation which comes from formal employment.

7 - Panorama social de América Latina. 2009. Capítulo I Pobreza y desigualdad en el contexto de la crisis económica (Social Overview of Latin America, 2009, Chapter 1, Poverty and inequality in the context of the economic crisis.)

The electoral process in Brazil - Diana Aguiar*

The case of the recent presidential elections in Brazil is key to understanding the threat to the permanence of progressive governments in the region. Although President Lula had levels of public approval never seen before, the election of his designated candidate Dilma Roussef was far from certain at any time during the electoral process. It is highly debatable if Lula's government was a true rupture with neoliberal policies, given its export-oriented agribusiness policies, its promotion of Brazilian transnational corporations abroad (especially in Latin America and in Portuguese-speaking Africa), the country's high interest rates in the period, etc. In fact, it was probably the period in the country's history in which the government was most active in supporting the national oligopolies profits internally and elsewhere.

On the other hand, cash transfer policies to the poorest population lifted the greatest amount of people ever out of poverty. This, coupled with a number of social policies and a renewed strengthening of Brazilian foreign policy

linked to processes in the region (such as MERCOSUR and UNASUR and bilateral relations) makes the picture more complex. It is hard to label this government in any straightforward way. Yet, when the elections came, most progressive individuals, no matter how critical of the governments' contradictions, preferred continuity of Lula's project than going back to the clearly neoliberal political forces that governed the country in the 90s.

To the surprise of the women's movement, strong gender politics was at play. Among the main arguments of right-wing candidate Mr. Jose Serra against Ms. Roussef was her historic support for the decriminalization of abortion, and a considerable amount of suspicious political maneuvering using her previous progressive views against her in the face of a very patriarchal society. Even the coupling of Mr. Serra with different faith based institutions, including members of the Catholic Church, was greatly used in the media to portray her as an atheist, something perceived as bad in a conserva-

tive country that otherwise congratulates itself on being highly tolerant of religious views. Finally, Mr. Serra continuously claimed Ms. Roussef was a puppet in President Lula hands and not capable of fulfilling the presidential role; claims that echoed a very sexist view of a female candidate.

Ms. Roussef might have been elected to guarantee the continuity of the Worker's Party project in the country. However, this was not as easy as many would expect given the popularity of Lula. Possibly because of the contradictions of an economic crisis that has not affected Brazil so badly, but widened the space for claims of rent-seeking and corruption in a state with a stronger role, contrary to what a neoliberal rationale would prescribe. At the same time, gender politics and sexist claims against the elected president seemed to be effective to a large extent. The social costs of the elections on the public debates on gender roles and women's rights in the Brazilian society might be greater than is possible to assess at the moment.

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...the complications and turbulences that bilateral conflict generates and which have intensified lately, must be underscored. The two breakdowns in political and economic relations between Venezuela and Colombia; the dramatic conflict between Colombia and Ecuador after the episode that cost the life of the commander of the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC), Raúl Reyes; the clash between Peru and Bolivia because of Evo Morales' position regarding Peruvian actions with their indigenous communities in the Amazon; the problems posed by Peru about maritime borders with Chile; the prolonged conflict between the governments of Argentina and Uruguay regarding the construction of two paper-processing plants; and the maritime disagreement between Surinam and Guyana. In all cases, these are obstacles that conspire against moving forward in the process of integration.

Luis Maira

"¿Cómo afectará la crisis la integración regional?"

(How will the crisis affect regional integration?),

Revista Nueva Sociedad N° 224

(Nueva Sociedad Magazine)

November-December 2009.

Global governance and regionalization processes: mutual reinforcement or trade-offs?

Diana Aguiar*

In the aftermath of the global economic crisis, a relevant and innovative process of global debates attracted much attention, the G20 meetings. Self-proclaimed as the space for global negotiations for the economic and financial architecture, it has an inner contradiction: it intends to formulate policies for the world without receiving any mandate from the excluded countries to do so. In the region, three countries are included among the select club: Argentina, Brazil and Mexico. Furthermore, Bra-

zil has gained significant attention given the buzz around the so-called BRIC countries and their expected role in the near future in international economy and politics. At the same time, the continent's biggest country's historic desire for a seat on the United Nations Security Council – a wish not supported by the other big countries in the region – has also led Brazil to a series of foreign policy actions, such as the attempt to negotiate a way out of the nuclear impasse with Iran.

It is not yet clear how and if this stronger global player role will impact Brazil's relationship in the region. There seems to be some caution among other countries' diplomatic services with what this might entail. Surely, Lula's charisma and the current good inter-governmental relationships might be lessening any possible regional side effect of Brazil's global foreign policy. Yet, the G20 process and the increased global role of a few countries of the region, especially Brazil, might have implications for the regional processes at play.

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Summary and recommendations

This document endeavored to give a general overview of the impact of the crisis on the region considering the gender perspective with an emphasis on work and employment.

As was seen, the economies were affected in different ways and through different channels. Therefore, even though certain similar characteristics can be seen in the situation of women, certain specific situations can also be observed.

As a result of the analysis, the need to establish public policy measures to facilitate work and family life for men and women, ensuring improvements to well-being, stands out. This is of particular importance for the population living in

poverty due to the over-representation of children and single parent households therein.

A correct appreciation of the changes in the situation of women and gender relations in the face of these types of processes requires a contextualized analysis that considers the situation of the economies, public policy responses and the characteristics of gender relations concurrently. It seems there is a need to carry out research, empirical in nature, for different countries with a comparative analysis to move forward in terms of knowledge of the issues and proposals for feasible policies aiming for social and gender equity.



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Impacts of the Crisis on Women's Rights: Sub regional perspectives

New from AWID is this 2010 edition of the brief series: Impacts of the Crisis on Women's Rights: Sub regional perspectives. We are excited to present an update, by region, to the exceptional research conducted in 2009 on the impact of the global financial crisis on women's rights. This update provides relevant new data, testimonies, and voices from women activists on the ground. Each case presents an opportunity to unpack the in-depth challenges faced by different women in diverse contexts while examining possible policy solutions from a feminist perspective. This work takes us on a journey to help us think beyond the financial crisis and its implications, and start reflecting about the new world being created. At AWID we believe these studies contribute to building and supporting women's movements.

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This publication is part of AWID's initiative: Influencing Development Actors and Practices for Women's Rights (IDeA) that seeks to contribute to advancing feminist understandings of the relationship between development and women's rights issues with a particular focus on the aid effectiveness agenda and the Financing for Development process at the UN.