

Recognizing Women's Rights, Essential for Inclusive and Sustainable Development

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Since the start of the 20th century, March has been a key month for fights for the rights of women who, despite persistent hurdles, have made enormous strides in the quest for guaranteeing their physical, economic and decision-making autonomy.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, women have been able to overcome obstacles, organize themselves, and forge a regional perspective, while also participating actively in global debates. Despite all these efforts, gender inequality continues to be a structural trait of the region.

In our countries, discrimination and violence against women continue to be a problem that manifests itself in the home, in public spaces, in places of study and work, and which has a decisive impact on their possibilities for generating their own income, starting businesses, overcoming poverty and developing themselves professionally and personally.

Today, on our continent, poverty still has the face of a woman: for every 100 men in this situation, there are 118 women who have not been able to cross the line out of hardship. One-third of Latin American women (29%) do not generate income and are economically dependent, and close to half have no link to the labor market.

In addition, despite the efforts to reduce the pay gap in recent decades, women's wages are 16.1% below those of men in the same condition. This gap widens for women with more years of study.

In terms of physical autonomy, the extreme phenomenon of femicide has been impossible to stop in the region, nor does it show signs of declining despite important regulatory and public policy advances. At least 2,795 women were murdered in 2017 for gender reasons in 23 countries of the region, according to official data compiled by ECLAC's Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean. The adolescent fertility rate is one of the highest in the world, outstripped only by the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. Overall, Latin American and Caribbean countries have an adolescent maternity rate that is above 12%, a figure that tends to be more significant in the group of adolescents with lower income and educational levels.

With regard to autonomy in decision-making, some electoral processes in the region have enabled a greater presence of women in national legislatures. Nonetheless, women continue to be underrepresented in decision-making spaces. The most recent statistics show that they only account for one-fourth of government ministers, and that their participation in cabinets tends to be concentrated in social and cultural areas, more than economic ones. In addition, according to the indicators for follow-up

and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals, in the region 29.2% of elected councilors on a local government level are women.

At ECLAC we have the conviction that gender inequality, in addition to being unfair, is profoundly inefficient, and is an obstacle that conspires against achieving sustainable development. For that reason, during this new commemoration of International Women's Day, we insist on the urgency of recognizing women's rights and equality as central elements that must cut across all of the State's actions aimed at strengthening democracy and attaining inclusive and sustainable development.