

ENGENDERING FREE TRADE IN JAMAICA: WOMEN AND THE FREE TRADE AREA OF THE AMERICAS (FTAA)

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Introduction

“Eliminating impediments to market access for goods and services among our countries will foster our economic growth. A growing world economy will also enhance our domestic prosperity. Free trade and increased economic integration are key factors for raising standards of living, improving working conditions of people in the Americas and better protecting the environment.”¹

Summit of the Americas, Declaration of Principles, Miami, 1994

In 1996, the Americas had a combined GDP of US\$7.7 trillion and combined market of over 745 million people in comparison to the European Union's (EU's) combined GDP of US\$7.2 trillion and population of 370 million.² However, the absence of cohesive and effective integration mechanism- political and economic- limited the areas ability to exploit these advantages. Since the mid-1990s, intra-regional trade has accounted for approximately 55% of the total trade in goods. However, the establishment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Mexico, Canada and the US in 1994, limited market-access by countries outside the bloc including Caribbean producers. The

¹ Miami Summit of the Americas, *Declaration of Principles*, Partnership for Development and Prosperity: Democracy, Free Trade and Sustainable Development in the Americas, 1994, <http://www.sice.oas.org/FTAA/miami/SADOPE.ASP#quote2>, July 19, 2002.

² Anthony Bryan and Andres Serbin, *Distant Cousins: The Caribbean-Latin American Relationship*, University of Miami North-South Centre Press, Miami, 1996, p. 123

creation of a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) was viewed as the long-awaited opportunity to regain access to the large North American market through the expansion of the existing trilateral bloc, and the creation of a 'vision' for deeper economic integration by removing remaining barriers to trade in goods and services as an essential component of stimulating development among its diverse membership.

The FTAA was envisioned to stretch from Canada to Argentina, including the countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Central American Common Market (CACM), the Andean Community, the Common Market of the Southern Cone (MERCOSUR) and the G-3 (Mexico, Venezuela and Colombia). The Heads of the thirty-four states, with the exception of Cuba, upon accepting the December 1994 Summit of the Americas challenge and agreeing to the establishment and implementation of the FTAA through a series of negotiations, embarked upon the creation of the world's largest free trade bloc with a combined market of some 800 million people and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of more than US\$11 trillion, and territory of 40 million square kilometres by 2005³.

However, one cannot assess the merits of this arrangement or the perceived benefits to be derived by Caribbean countries from such a vast undertaking from a purely simply economic angle. The globalisation process is contradictory as it may facilitate growth and human development for some in some places while limiting and undermining that of others. These 'contradictions' manifest

³ The Organisation of American States (OAS) website, 2002

themselves in socio-economic, socio-cultural and socio-political spheres as well as within the economy. It has also been noted that it tends to be women and the otherwise vulnerable and marginalised who experience the most adverse effects of the negative impact of processes of global reconstruction. This comes as a result of the low social value placed on their productive input and non-recognition of their needs within the matrix of economic development and the allocation of resources. Consequently, gender must be included and considered in redefining and reconciling these processes as a category of analysis and planning. This paper will examine the possible negative impact of the FTAA- as proposed by OAS heads- on the lives and livelihoods of women in the English-speaking Caribbean and make recommendations on how the negotiations and resulting agreement maybe reformed in an effort to produce conditions which will empower rather than endanger families and communities across this region.

The FTAA Process

The Organization of American States (OAS) undertaking may be seen as a 'high-point' in hemispheric co-operative and integration efforts since the late 1960s when several Caribbean countries including Jamaica, Trinidad and Barbados joined the grouping. The final declaration of the Miami Summit, the so-called "*Partnership for the Development and Prosperity of the Americas*", emphasized the strengthening of democracy, eradication and/or alleviation of poverty, the sustainable development and growth of its members, and conceptualised the framework for the FTAA. Cuba was excluded from both the negotiating process and the future evolution of integrated trade in the region as it 'failed to meet the

requirement of a democratic system of government' and, according to the OAS and scholars in international relations, that is crucial to the process of liberal trade under a neo-liberal model of globalisation.

The FTAA /OAS leaders designated three hosts of the negotiations at the 1994 summit. The US, Panama and Mexico were chosen to share the responsibility of hosting the series of meetings scheduled between 1998 and 2004. The FTAA Secretariat was expected to be based in Miami between May 1998 and February 2001, Panama City between March 2001 and February 2003, and Mexico City between March 2003 and December 2004. As such, with neither the Secretariat nor meetings being based in one country it was expected that this would deter the overt influence of any specific members on all aspects of FTAA formation. Theoretically, the negotiating process as well as the resulting free market area was intended to be balanced with meaningful and active participation from all members in the decision-making and policy formulation, implementation and operation. Negotiators were, therefore, lauded for having recognised the politics among and needs and concerns of the group's diverse membership and in particular those of Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS). However, with the US, Canadian, Brazilian and Mexican economies forming much of the proposed market area of the FTAA, this heterogeneous and asymmetrical grouping is susceptible- if not prone- to political fragmentation and the marginalization and decline of smaller, more fragile economies and socio-political systems.

The Working Group on Smaller Economies, which was initially chaired by current Director General of the Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery (CRNM) Ambassador Richard Bernal, played a major role in bringing the concerns of smaller concerns to the fore of negotiations in what was essentially an unresponsive environment. Unresponsive, as participants in the initiative did not share the concerns of fragmentation, openness and smallness which plagued the Less Developed Countries (LDCs) in CARICOM. As a result of the working group's lobby, smaller economies were granted a period of compliance in consolidating a shift to reciprocal trade arrangements from forms of preferences.

Free Trade Area and the Commonwealth Caribbean

According to several scholars, the Caribbean's participation in hemispheric free trade should be "seen as part of a process of erecting a framework to move them from the protected inward-looking arrangements of the past that will improve their chances in dynamic global markets in the Western Hemisphere, Western Europe, Asia or elsewhere"⁴. The appeal of an FTAA to the leaders of the Commonwealth Caribbean is somewhat indistinguishable in 2008- the negotiations having been stalled for the past 5 or so years. The historical context, however, indicates that the FTAA was not merely viewed by regional heads as NAFTA-parity and carving out a niche in the global marketplace but as the most accessible and available means of deterring political fragmentation and weathering economic adversity. The interest in maintaining the integrity of

⁴ Serbin and Bryan, 1996, p. 121-3

Caribbean states has shifted from the geopolitical to the 'geoeconomic' and, as such, regionalization has been heralded as being one of the best "options" for repositioning the region among the world's economic powers.⁵

The 1993 West Indian Commission *Time for Action* report recommended that CARICOM "widen and deepen" integration efforts towards a "transformation of perceptions of a Commonwealth Caribbean to those of a Caribbean Commonwealth"⁶. Simply put, the Commission insisted that countries within the region needed to build on their historical and cultural linkages and introduce and implement strategies for bringing together their economies and societies in a more deliberate, systematic and structured manner in order to remain competitive and viable in the international political economy. Global trends have indicated that it is necessary for small and comparatively weak states in particular to embark upon 'multilateralism' in order to overcome "factors and constraints of development through a movement to expand and deepen relations with other states that have shared priorities and objectives"⁷. The ongoing discourse on 'vulnerability and viability' of SIDS is also fundamental in conceptualising the region's participation in free trade areas as it has influenced the pursuit of integrationist policy within the region. Studies such as the 1997 Commonwealth Secretariat's *A Future for Small States: Overcoming Vulnerability* have indicated that the survival of small-island economies inherently lay is cooperative mechanisms.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Report of the West Indian Commission, Time For Action, 1993

⁷ Serbin and Bryan, op. cit. p.92

Since the failed West Indies Federation of the 1960s, Caribbean island states have repeatedly pursued regional co-operation agreements, such as the Treaty of Chaguaramas which established CARICOM, Caribbean Free Trade Area (CARIFTA) and the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSM&E), which have been aimed at creating a larger more profitable market in by taking advantage of economies of scale and reduce susceptibility to and the impacts of external shocks. In 1993, CARICOM states had a combined market of approximately US\$14.08 billion and 5.9 million people. Conversely, Jamaica domestic market was 2.7 million in 2007. Individual economies are highly dependent on foreign markets and market preferences and have faced economic instability as a result of contractions in those economies and the end of preferential treatment in major export sectors such as agriculture. Economic fallout in countries such as Dominica, St. Lucia, Jamaica and St. Vincent from the removal of EU preferences on bananas under the successive Lome Conventions following the 1997 World Trade Organisation (WTO) ruling, for example, was precipitated by an average decline of 60% in banana export earnings.⁸

A 2003 report of the Caribbean Trade and Adjustment Group in the CRNM, acknowledges that “implicit” in the discourse of CARICOM repositioning in the global economy through free trade and improved competitiveness is the “assumption that the adjustments and reconstruction to be undertaken will be for the benefit of the people – that they will expand employment, reduce poverty,

⁸ Statement by Hon. Pierre Charles, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Dominica to the 58th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, September 25, 2003, <http://www.un.org/webcast/ga/58/statements/domieng030925.htm>

improve living standards for the society as a whole” and “diminish the incidence of inequality”⁹. However, the very praxis of free and liberal trade reveals its dependence on inequality and uneven ownership in order to be successful. In other words, liberal trade is dependent on the exploitation of cheap sources of labour and raw materials by the industrialised in the manufacture of finished goods which are then sold on the world market. The exploitation often deliberately target women and girls LDCs.

On Gender: An Alternative View

As such, the ideal of free trade promoting benefits and growth in LDCs has not successfully withstood the challenge of critical theories such as feminism and practitioners in the field of gender and development studies. Gender defines and re-defines individual perspectives, experiences and value systems as it differentiates and denotes a social order which incorporates ideals of masculinity and femininity. According to Kate Young, “by using gender we are using a shorthand term which encodes a very crucial point: in that, our basic social identities as men and women are socially constructed rather than based on fixed biological characteristics”.¹⁰ The core assumption that masculinity- and masculine concerns and standards- and femininity- and the concerns of and standards to which women are held- are inextricably bound within physical differences has largely been refuted by social scientists. However, it is somewhat

⁹ Report of the Caribbean Trade and Adjustment Group, Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery (CRNM), Improving Competitiveness for Caribbean Development, CARICOM/ Ian Randle Publishers: Kingston, 2003

¹⁰ Kate Young, “Notes on the Social Relations of Gender” in Gender in Caribbean Development, edited by Patricia Mohammed and Catherine Shepherd, Kingston: Canoe Press, 1999, p. 98

cliché to reference gender as merely a 'social construct' as the process of gendering is as much responsible for establishing communal or shared principles and practices as it is the product of these. Gender may therefore be viewed as an end as well as a means. As such, women assume and are ascribed reproductive and productive roles based on natural order- child-bearer and nurturer- as well as what are believed to be the accompanying qualities, suitable characteristics, abilities and inherent disadvantages.

This discussion does not seek to re-examine the gender debate and retry patriarchy as the fundamental source of women's repression, but recognises that the ascription of gender, and gender roles and statuses, produces an 'asymmetrical' systemic arrangement between men and women based on the perceived biological sex differences and pursuant ideologies regarding their resulting limitations, consequent rights and values as producers, owners, and citizens.¹¹ This social imbalance is reflected in the peculiar way in which men and women experience and relate to the same things including the twin forces of globalisation and capital accumulation. Upon examining the position of women and men in the international political economy, we note stark differences in the allocation of resources, levels and types of employment associated with each sex, and grave disparity in the wages earned for similar work. The existence and integration of systemic biases and makes it crucial for policy-makers and planners to consider gender in any serious review of features or problems that

¹¹ Valentine Moghadam, "Feminisms and Development", in Feminisms and Internationalism edited by Sinha, Guy and Woollacott, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999, p.248

have been identified in political economy in order to fully integrate findings into the programmes which will lead to the alleviation of hardships which may accompany implementation.

Gender Analyses

As such, a gender analysis endeavours and sets out to address the individual effects of macro-economic policy such as the formation and implementation of an FTAA. It is being argued that a gender perspective will reveal threats human development such as the impact on minorities, the poor, and the environment, which are typically 'hidden' within the context of traditional analyses.

“Trade policies have different consequences for women and men because women and men differ in their access to economic resources, their social responsibilities and in their biological make up. Thus trade policy impacts on the economic, social, cultural and political welfare of both men and women in particular ways that concern each.”¹²

When subjected to a gender analysis, theories, concepts, events and issues are, therefore, viewed through the eyes of those comprising the base of gendered hierarchies and their impact assessed within the context of the experience of these subordinate groups. The Gender and Development (GAD) approach suggests that the “benefits of modernization and economic development seemed

¹² Peggy Antrobus, 'Gender Issues in International Trade', Development Alternatives of Women for a New Era (DAWN), http://www.dawn.org.fj/publications/di_3_1999/gendertradeissues.html, July 1, 2002.

to accrue more to men than to women, and that women were often marginalized from new productive processes and commercial enterprises".¹³ By integrating this perspective into traditional development studies and policy-making, one acknowledges that that which is omitted is often as or more important, contextually, than that which is included and emphasized.

Gendered studies of events and socio-economic phenomena are premised on and highlight the specific and different experiences of women and the marginalised which are typically excluded from traditional theorizing and policy-making. Gender analyses attempt to challenge narrow and 'masculinised' views and revision thought to include that which has been excluded and/ or overlooked in order to influence and inform action. Hence, it is "an analysis of the social relations within the family, market, state and community that illuminates the ways in which gender and other inequalities are created and reproduced. It examines the social processes through which human needs are met as well as the institutions through which inequalities are constructed and reproduced."¹⁴

Feminist scholarship prescribes gender analyses in undertaking a fulsome assessment of the allocation and exercise of global power from the standpoint of the powerless and vulnerable. Gender analyses seek to produce solutions aimed at improving their immediate position in mitigating the adverse effects of scarcity

13 See Moghadam 1999: 246; Susan Joekes, "A Gender-Analytical Perspective on Trade and Sustainable Development" in United Nations Council on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), *Trade, Sustainable Development and Gender*. New York and Geneva, 1999; Ester Boserup, *Women's Role in Economic Development*, London: Earthscan Publications, 1970: 221

14 Carol Miller and Shahra Razavi, "Gender Analysis: Alternative Paradigms", United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 1998

and development programmes on their circumstances as well as meeting strategic needs which safeguard the sustainable gains.

The Impact of the FTAA on Caribbean Women

Since Boserup's groundbreaking work *Women's Role in Economic Development* in 1970, it has been debated that despite the significant contribution made by women in the global economy, it is continually undermined and understated¹⁵. In 1980 women constituted half the world's population, did 2/3 of its work, received 10% of its income and owned 1% of its property. The 1995 Women and Poverty Diagnosis of the Beijing Platform for Action revealed that this had increased disproportionately and it is noted that women today earn little over 50% of the wages of their male counterparts doing similar jobs.¹⁶ According to the United Nations Development Programme for Women (UNIFEM), nearly 900 million women live on less than US\$1 per day. It is often the case that the impact of development strategies and free trade is deemed to be gender neutral; economic policies are believed to have the same basic effects on men as they do on women and as such women's status, needs and particular systemic challenges are not considered when formulating and implementing programmes and strategies.

The 'feminisation of poverty' may be directly linked to gender biases and stereotypes in employment as women are excluded from newer industrialized and technology-driven free trade areas such as the information technology sector

¹⁵ Boserup, op. cit.

¹⁶ 'Platform for Action', United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, China, September 1995, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/poverty.htm>

based on their perceived lack of scientific or mechanical aptitude. These areas often attract the highest wages and are often more sustainable. However, women's employment in traditional manufacturing free zones, particularly in garment construction, and the service industry are often based on casual and seasonal labour with wages below national minimum wage requirements, under harsh conditions and for long hours.

Women are also often compromised in their reproductive responsibilities. Women and children comprise almost 80% of the world's poor and Caribbean women arguably head approximately 50% of the region's household¹⁷. These families are more at risk from the influence of 'multi-nationalism' on increasing the cost of health care, education and other public resources. Low-income women in many cases feel forced to choose between the cost of food and electricity, for example, due to the high cost of the service introduced after state-run utilities are divested to foreign investors. The FTAA's negotiators promise that the agreement will seek to promote the realisation of women's abilities by emphasising access to educational opportunities and skills training by women and girls. The FTAA has claimed that it will take 'appropriate' steps to enhance women's involvement in productive sectors beyond traditionally female occupations, facilitate female economic autonomy with the implementation of safeguards to achieve equal access to employment at all levels for men and women, and encourage the establishment of adequate and effective welfare and credit systems to aid

¹⁷ David Lehmann, "Female-Headed Households in Latin America and the Caribbean: Problems of Analysis and Conceptualisation", Published Papers, 2000 <http://www.davidlehmann.org/david-docs-pdf/Pub-pap/FEMALE-HEADED%20HOUSEHOLDS%20IN%20LATIN%20AMERICA%20AND%20THE%20%20CARIBBEAN.pdf>

women in acquiring of financing and land.”¹⁸ Nevertheless, evidence suggests that over 90% of 27 million workers who are women, particularly in Mexico, are being exploited under the NAFTA created free trade zones¹⁹. As the FTAA has not yet come into being, one may extrapolate from such precedence set within the Americas and make reasonable forecasts regarding the fate likely to befall the region’s societies, communities, families and women.

Employment Opportunities

The FTAA and other economic integration partnerships promise to expand the labour market and create more employment opportunities for both men and women. The establishment of new industries and businesses by foreign investors, the introduction of MNCs and TNCs and re-investment and divestment of existing sectors in order to promote efficiency and competitiveness is expected to create thousands of new jobs in Jamaica and the rest of CARICOM. However, Caribbean Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA) has identified four main ways in which the prospects that are associated with and being encouraged by the FTAA liberalisation will serve to further marginalise and depress Caribbean women.²⁰ These are:

1. Gender based discrimination in the formal labour sector will affect the wages and types of employment available to Caribbean women. Failure to recognize women’s unpaid labour in households according to traditional

¹⁸ Aurita Withers, “The OAS/FTAA and Women”, http://www.stopftaa.org?info/info_womyn1.html, July 2, 2002

¹⁹ Barbara Walker Graham, “Feminist Action Against the FTAA” in *Awakened Woman*, May 16, 2001.

²⁰ Caribbean Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA), “Special Focus on Gender and Trade”, CAFRA Perspective in *Caribbean Beacon*, Volume 3, 2000.

- gender theories of production leads to the undervaluing of their wage labour;
2. Free trade areas give rise to the creation of EPZs which rely on a large, cheap labour source. Women are therefore most often employed as an ideal source. Caribbean women in these zones earn below minimum wage and work between fifty and eighty hours per week under poor working conditions;
 3. Jobs created in EPZs tend to lack benefits such as health and insurance benefits, and workers tend to be prohibited from seeking union representation; and
 4. Women will be increasingly forced into the informal sector and 'outsourcing' in which firms pay women who remain at home and complete assigned tasks. This method of employment attracts no protection under the law.

Despite the 'good-faith' clause governing domestic labour laws outlined in Article 18 of the draft agreement²¹, it has been the experience of this region that governments firmly focused on maximising foreign investment often do 'relax' these as it has proven subjective to weigh the 'appropriateness' of measures taken within a climate of economic fluctuation, marginality and decline. Women's

²¹ Article 18 states that "The Parties recognize that it is inappropriate to encourage investment by relaxing domestic labor laws. Accordingly, each Party shall strive to ensure that it does not waive or otherwise derogate from, or offer to waive or otherwise derogate from, such laws as encouragement for the establishment, acquisition, expansion or retention of an investment of an investor in its territory."

human rights- including reproductive rights- are often undermined and compromised in these circumstances. Women are often exploited and abused in unprotected jobs under harsh working conditions. It is estimated that 500,000 women in the free trade zones (FTZs) of Central America and the Caribbean work in conditions where they are forced to take birth control pills while producing goods for the North American market, for example. Their labour remains cheaper than that of their male counterparts' as the failure to recognize women's unpaid labour within the household precipitates an undervaluing of their labour outside of that setting.²² Although they comprise almost 80% of workers in export processing zones (EPZs) they receive 20 to 50% less than men working in the same zones.²³ New services exported by Caribbean countries such as in routine data entry and call centres have targeted women as a large, available, cheap source of labour. However, at Jamaica's Digiport facility, which operates as a FTZ for the industry, female employees complain of long shifts and unhealthy conditions among other things.²⁴

In a neo-liberal trade model, it is also essential to recognise that multi-national and trans-national corporations (MNCs and TNCs) exert the greatest influence over the path to development and growth. The consequences for Caribbean women and states become dire as the increasing dependent on foreign direct investment (FDIs) lead to unsustainable, uneven and unstable development. The annual export of textiles by Caribbean FTZs from Jamaica and a few other minor

²² "Special Focus on Gender and Trade", The Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action" perspective in *Caribbean Beacon*, Vol. 3, 2000.

²³ UNIFEM 1998

²⁴ "Peoples' Action and Solidarity Challenging Globalisation", Women's Group of ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) 2000 People's Forum, Seoul 2000.

producers was valued at US\$10 million in 1980, US\$570 million in 1995 and declined to US\$360 million by 2003. These dramatic fluctuations have also had significant impact on the employment and income of women who often head their households. Employment for the young women in the textile industry fell drastically from 50,000 in the mid-1990s to 7,888 by 2003.²⁵ In 2000, 67% of all persons made unemployed due to economic decline were women.²⁶

Regional governments of the 1980s and 1990s have also been found to have suppressed the minimum wage paid to workers in an effort attract investment in these areas under initiatives such as the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI).

However, according to Cecelia Green Jamaica went “furthest in devaluing its currency and structurally adjusting its economy into a new role as a cheap-labour supplying, export-processing adjunct of the United States.”²⁷ 15% of the labour force was regarded as part-time or casual labourers and by 1990 Jamaica’s hourly minimum wage had fallen to US\$0.27- the lowest in the region.²⁸ Women who do not earn a decent wage find it difficult to care for themselves and their families adequately, and find themselves in a persistent state of poverty.

According to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the region’s governments are in a “race to the bottom to attract foreign investors.”

²⁵ CRNM, 2003 op. cit

²⁶ Brenda Wyss and Marceline White, The Effects of Trade Liberalisation on Jamaica’s Poor: An Analysis of Agriculture and Services, Women’s Edge Coalition and CAFRA, June 2004

²⁷ Cecelia Green, “At the Junction of the Global and the Local: Transnational Industry and Women Workers in the Caribbean”, in Human Rights, Labour Rights and International Trade, edited by Lance Compa and Stephen Diamond, University of Pennsylvania Press, Pennsylvania, 2003

²⁸ Summary of Testimony on the Effects of Structural Adjustment Programs, Presented At the International Peoples’ Tribunal to Judge The G-7, Organized by the Pacific Asia Resource Center (PARC) Convened in Tokyo, 3-4 July 1993, The Development Gap, http://www.developmentgap.org/global/summary_testimony_on_effects_saps_to_international_peoples_tribunal_to_judge_g7.pdf

Regional heads have been accused of sacrificing the well-being of their working populations by ignoring industrial disputes and relaxing labour laws and minimum wage laws. The ICFTU further claims that when one considers the average wage of the poorest 20% in Latin America as a basis for making predictions regarding the impact of the FTAA on the region's labour force, "the cost of a worker hired under the flexible terms that prevail today is cheaper than the cost of buying, maintaining and disciplining slaves" during the region's early history.²⁹ The vast majority of these will be women.

The Family

The family as the basic unit of society is no more evident elsewhere than it is in the Caribbean. Traditionally, communities emerge as the outgrowth of kinship systems in these small islands. Caribbean women are the primary care-givers within these families as mothers, grandmothers and aunts, and, as has been previously noted, possibly 1/2 Caribbean households have de jure or de facto female heads. The erosion of traditional family structures becomes a concern to these women with their employment outside the home. As wage-earners women often leave young children in the care of older siblings and other family members while they work. Some women also families leave rural areas to go to urban centres where the large factories and facilities are based. It has been noted that this may encourage truancy and juvenile delinquency among these children with

²⁹ Fifteenth Continental Conference, International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, <http://www.orit-ciosl.org/debate/basedoc.html>, July 4, 2002.

a breakdown in normal family relations and later lead to wider social problems including an increase in levels of crime and a decline in productivity.

Social Services

With an increase in poverty in Jamaica from 16.9% to 19.7% between 2001 and 2002, consumption in female-headed households declined by 14%.³⁰ The burden placed on women in their reproductive role as matriarchs is likely to be further exacerbated by a reduction in the availability of social services and public goods. As Caribbean economies rely more heavily on foreign trade as a source of revenue via import duties and licenses than their hemispheric neighbours³¹, the reduction in revenue, coupled with increased costs in technological and capital inputs, will further negatively impact the governments' ability to provide and administer "essential" social and infrastructural services has become one of the region's major concerns.³²

The liberalisation of Caribbean economies will likely result in the removal of:

- Price controls and subsidies on the cost of basic food items and services
- Rent controls
- Welfare services provided by the state such as health care and education
- Divestment of state-owned utilities such as electricity and potable water

As noted by Dr. Michael Witter (2008) these will most seriously affect uneducated or semi-educated poor women living in rural communities.

³⁰ Wyss and White, op. cit.

³¹ Bryan and Serbin op. cit. and Anthony Bryan, The Caribbean: New Dynamics in Trade and Political Economy, Transaction Publishers, New Jersey 1995

³² Bryan op. cit

Cottage Industries and Small Businesses

30% of semi or uneducated Jamaican women operate small business enterprises as in much of the Caribbean. As such, the threat to families dependent on the income earned from small-scale businesses and indigenous cottage industries, such as the manufacture of craft items for export, posed by wealthy large-scale producers and firms will become a more pressing concern. One example is cited in that women “cannot sue when their original handicraft designs are patented by a big corporation and mass produced and sold elsewhere.”³³ Conversely, the terms of the FTAA further requires governments to protect foreign investors under Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITS) from any infringements by local competitors in the market by monitoring and enforcing regulations governing licensing, pricing and marketing activities.

Female Autonomy and Empowerment

Several positive gains made by women in recent years may be enhanced by the region’s integration into a global market. In a UN Development Programme (UNDP) workshop on HIV and Development it was noted that Caribbean women had increasingly assumed a dominant role in society and the family in terms of performance in education and the workplace, the ownership of property and female de facto headship. The “consistent out-performance of males”³⁴ at the secondary and tertiary level serves to put females in a more qualified position for

³³ Carol Brouillet, “FTAA Threatens Women”, February 2001, Speech to Senator Feinstein, US Congress, <http://www.communitycurrency.org/ftaa.html>

³⁴ Barry Chevannes, ‘What We Sow We Reap: Problems in the Cultivation of Male Identity in Jamaica’, The Grace Kennedy Foundation Lecture Series, March 1999.

accessing prestigious and well-paying jobs and ensuring personal development. The ratio of men to women enrolled at the University of the West Indies for the 1999/2000 has been estimated to be as high as 1:3. At the St. Augustine and Cave Hill campuses for the 1994/1995 academic year, 57% women gained degrees and 43% men³⁵. As such, within a framework based on knowledge, resources, and free and fair competition it is expected that highly-qualified women will be well positioned to find employment at the highest level, earn higher wages and adequately support themselves and their families. It is also expected that this will impact power relations among men and women as women become less dependent and attain positions of leadership.

However, according to ECLAC, Caribbean women are “facing erosion of the social, economic and political gains made since independence” as a result of the globalized market place. Despite growing self-sufficiency, women have remained at the bottom of the social, political and economic ladders in the Caribbean. In a 1970 survey in Trinidad, it was found that 58.3% of persons earning less than US\$500 per annum were women, and only 5% of those earning over US\$900. The pervasive ‘glass-ceiling’ has not been shattered in government or the private sector and women continue to play a ‘supporting role’, even at the highest levels, to men of power as opposed to holding the power themselves as a result of pervasive gender politics and stereotypes. The ideology that women are unfit to lead or incapable of tackling serious challenges, continues to hinder strides towards female autonomy. Social psychologist Johnetta Cole has argued that in

³⁵ Barbara Bailey, “Not An Open Book: Gender Achievement and Education in the Caribbean”, Working Paper 1, Centre for Gender and Development Studies, UWI Mona 1997, p.29

the Caribbean and among African-Americans, women continue to be seen as the 'cheerleaders' rather than the major players. There are no guarantees that new opportunities will include women or that they will earn equal wages, benefits and promotion alongside their male colleagues.

The World Bank publication *Engendering Development* suggests that it will become more important for government interventions to address "improved female autonomy, leadership and voice within the context of society as opposed to development markers such as welfare" [World Bank 2001: 272]. It is therefore essential to recognise that the basis of female exploitation in the domestic and global economy is rooted in existing and entrenched social constraints to female empowerment. It is critical that women's needs be addressed in this strategic-long-term manner rather than creating band-aid and stop-gap social policies in the short-term with the problems associated with economic growth having developed.

In the 2002 *UNDP Human Development Report*, Jamaica ranked 67 of 146 countries in the Gender Related Development Index (GDI) which takes into consideration estimated expected incomes, educational enrolment ratios and life expectancy at birth. Bahamas and Trinidad and Tobago ranked 38 and 45 respectively, with Guyana ranking 85 behind countries such as Saudi Arabia (72) and China (77) that have been widely accused of gender discrimination and gross violations against women's rights.³⁶ As such, policy analysis must distinguish between development as economic growth and wealth creation for

³⁶ Australia, Belgium and Norway ranked in the top 3 of the index while Canada and the US were ranked at 5 and 6 respectively.

those at the top of the social structure, to development as enhancing human capabilities³⁷ particularly the ability of those marginal groups to access tools and facilities with which to improve their living conditions and maximise their potential.

The Impact Gender Inequality on Productivity

There are three fundamental arguments to consider when one attempts to reconcile the human face of development with economic targets. It may also be useful to economists and free trade experts to note that:

- A reduction in gender inequality in the Caribbean may increase productivity by giving women the same access to technical, financial and natural resources as men including education and training, funding for small and medium scale enterprises and land. The failure to invest in a gender-balanced system of education lowers Gross National Product (GNP). In order to counter this, Caribbean states must ensure that their entire labour force is equipped to function at all levels;
- Gender inequality also reduces the productivity of future generations as it hampers women's ability to educate their children. It is assumed that a woman's extra income is more likely to be channelled towards the family than that of a man. As such, equal wage for equal work is more than a moral condition to

³⁷ See Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000; Amrtya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, New York: Alfred Knopf (Anchor Books), 1999

employment but may, in fact, be viewed as investment in regional economic stability.

- In the region's EPZs there is no incentive to produce large quantities of tradable goods as women are not compensated adequately and are forced to work under exploitative, inhumane conditions. Ameliorating this situation is likely to encourage and increase the value and quality of exports in the relevant sectors.

Resistance: Women's Activism

A number of anti-FTAA feminist action groups have been formed and protests have been held in Canada in response to the perceived threat to women posed by the emerging bloc and the indifference with which negotiators have approached women's rights, concerns, freedoms and status. At the Quebec meeting held in April 2001, 300 women protested against the FTAA claiming that the negotiations have not only ignored the impact of the zone on women and children, but have excluded women from contributing to policy formulation. One protestor stated that the meetings, such as that held in Canada, are held in "fortresses"- away from public participation and scrutiny.

Of the 4 special committees and 9 working/ negotiating groups, none were mandated to examine gender issues or address or raise concerns relating to the gendered effect of the FTAA on women's labour, welfare and development³⁸. The view is that this indicates a lack of commitment or will on the part of negotiators

³⁸ From a Gender and Development perspective, it is suggested that FTAA development objectives should include nutrition, health care and family planning which are classified as *practical gender needs* (PGN) and equity and equality, *strategic gender needs* (SGN)

and OAS leaders to embark upon an honest critique of how this decision taken at the highest political level will affect those at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder.

Although 25 out of the 34 members have signed the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence against Women, Canada and the US still have not ratified the agreement. As such, neither country may be penalized for any infringements on women's rights by their many MNCs if or when any are committed against the women of the Americas at the establishment of the FTAA.

Recommendations

In reducing the negative impact of the FTAA prior to implementation, negotiators and regional heads are recommended to establish a working group on gender within the Secretariat specifically tasked with undertaking the assessment of the status, living conditions and issues facing women within the Caribbean and throughout, and making policy recommendations on how best a compatible economic programme may be introduced with the least negative consequences to the vulnerable. They may also embark upon the following approaches in generating and understanding women's survival strategies within their context.

- *Gender Mainstreaming and the FTAA*

Gender sensitive projects should be designed and put in place. Project designs should target women and the poor based on the actual situation at the particular time in a particular area. The income and other disparities between urban and

rural women in the Caribbean renders programmes formulated from studies in one area unsuitable to another. 72% of Jamaica's poor reside in rural areas with poor transportation, little running water and limited electricity supply. As such, women's small business ventures are less likely to succeed than in the cities. It is also essential that the women who are most affected be targeted by and become involved in project activities rather than those who are far-removed such as intellectual and political elites.

The data collection process is also integral to gender-mainstreaming with regard to the FTAA in differentiating and understanding the specific effects of the arrangements and sensitisation efforts on different groups- particularly women. Sex-disaggregated data collection and analysis is, therefore, key in assessing the positive and negative impact of the trade policy. Gender-sensitive indicators also reflect by region and site the success or failure of the programme. It is recommended, as a result, that an assessment of the impact of other comparable policies such as the CBI and partial economic liberalisation efforts be immediately undertaken across the region to predict the most likely effects of entering into the FTAA.

- *Trade Impact Review (TIR)*

The Women's Edge Coalition developed the Trade Impact Review (TIR) in 2002 as a blueprint for governments, policymakers and negotiators to evaluate the possible gains to be reaped and disadvantages of embarking upon particular trade agreements prior to signing. According to Women's Edge and CAFRA, "the framework assesses the direct and indirect economic effects of a change in trade

or investment policy as well as the legal and regulatory changes of conflicts that a new trade policy may pose.”³⁹

Conclusion

The FTAA negotiations have stalled since 2001. However, the planned integration has not been shelved and, with the growing dominance of the European Union in international trade and political economy, the collapse of negotiations within the World Trade Organisation, and the recent initialling of the CARIFORUM/EU Economic Partnership Agreement, the movement towards hemispheric free trade is even more likely to be revived.

The FTAA has proved unconcerned with benchmarks for sustainable development and the necessary improvement of the standards of living and welfare in the Americas in that the draft agreement has not included or made mention of a programme of social action. It may be successfully argued that the ‘dollars and cents’ of the FTAA are and have been foremost in the minds of the negotiators. Its focus, therefore, may be viewed as strictly geared towards market access, investment and competition as covered in Article 1 of the 2001 Draft Agreement presented at the Third Summit.⁴⁰

³⁹ Wyss and White op. Cit.

⁴⁰ Article 1 states: “The purpose of this Chapter is to create, and maintain and expand a single, broad government procurement market among the Parties in order to maximize and optimize generate business market access opportunities in government procurement for participating the Parties’ suppliers of originating goods and services of the Parties and to reduce the business transactions costs of the public and private sectors in the Parties, and as well as ensuring the greatest simplicity in the application of government procurement measures.”

The FTAA will alter the lives of Caribbean women and their families in very real, inescapable ways once established. Scott states that in rethinking and remodelling development and in envisioning sustainable growth, the 'household' must be located in the world system of neo-liberal, capitalist expansion⁴¹

Women's empowerment is crucial to the viability of Jamaica's development strategies. The basic element of society and its organization is rooted in the home and in order to reorganize and reposition the socio-economic structure, a bottom up approach is required. Free and liberal trade will act as a catalyst, a turning point, in Jamaican and Caribbean histories, once implemented, and play a decisive role in its future success or failure.

Women in the Caribbean must pioneer a movement in order to assist social planners and economists in becoming more 'gender-aware'. Organizations such as DAWN (Development Alternatives of Women for a New Era) Caribbean, CAFRA and the Strategic Analysis for Gender Equity (SAGE) have embarked upon campaigns aimed at educating and sensitising governments, policy-makers and the wider society with regards to women's rights and the improvement of their living conditions in the face of these hemispheric plans. It has become necessary to lobby CARCOM heads in order to open deliberations within the dormant and defunct working group aimed at the Participation of Civil Society of the FTAA, for example, in order to utilize the available mechanisms within the negotiations for raising their concerns and outlining their recommendations.

⁴¹ Catherine Scott, Gender and Development: Rethinking Modernization and Dependency Theory, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London, 1995, p.133

Non-information (as opposed to misinformation) has been a significant factor in the extent to which Jamaica Caribbean women have been assertive in lobbying their representatives. It is being posited that the disadvantages have neither been fully examined or the findings of these examination not held up to public scrutiny as their consequences may be seen as justifiable means to an end or not acknowledged at all. Regional governments have failed to embark upon broad public education programmes and widespread consultations on the implications of the Caribbean's participation in the area for welfare, culture and daily life. It is the responsibility of groups including women's groups to ensure that necessary steps are taken to address this problem and in so doing create a more equitable, balanced and mutually-beneficial framework in which the promotion of women's sustainable development is not only relevant, but also important and critical.

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