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**WOMEN AND THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY:
THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC REFORM
IN LATIN AMERICA**

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THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC REFORM
IN LATIN AMERICA**

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Preface

The Latin American Program is pleased to publish the following work as part of its occasional Working Paper series. The collection of essays was commissioned by the Program for the conference, "Women and Democracy in Latin America: The Argentine Case," held at the Wilson Center on February 28 and March 1, 1994.

The political and economic restructuring undergone by countries in Latin America has challenged traditional concepts of governance throughout the region. The profound social impact of economic reforms and years of authoritarian rule resulted in an unprecedented range of social movements. Recent academic research has recognized the contributions made by women to these movements. What is less widely recognized is that women are continuing to play a critical role in the political transformations in the region, both through social movements and through the growing integration of women into the formal political system. As democratic institution-building continues, it becomes increasingly important to understand the links between the political and economic transformations that have taken place, and the role of women in consolidated democracies. How can the political, social and economic demands of women be most effectively channeled and represented within the framework of institutionalized democracy? What has been and will be the role of women's movements? How have women been affected by economic adjustment and what kinds of public policies can alleviate its adverse impact?

In an effort to bring these issues to the attention of the policy community in Washington, the Latin American Program of the Woodrow Wilson International Center in Washington, and the *Foro de la Mujer* of the *Banco de la Ciudad* in Buenos Aires held the conference, "Women and Democracy in Latin America: The Argentine Case." Leading scholars and politicians, as well as representatives from the business, labor and NGO communities, explored the role of women in the political and economic transformations throughout Latin America, with a special emphasis on Argentina. Topics included the rise of women's social movements during the transition period, the impact of structural adjustment on women, public policies to promote more equitable economic and political participation, and the role of women in decision-making processes in both private and public sectors. Women leaders from Argentina were joined by a group of U.S.-based academics who provided regional overviews to set the framework for a subsequent discussion of the Argentine case. The four papers contained in this publication are summaries of those overviews, examining overall trends in women's political and economic participation in Latin America.

Part I focuses on women in Latin American politics. Dr. Jane Jaquette's presentation, "Women's Movements and Democracy in Latin America: Some Unresolved Tensions," describes the conflict between the revolutionary roots of many women's movements and the current need for women to achieve power within formal institutional structures. She describes how women's social

movements in Latin America have been analyzed as examples of ways to reconstruct traditional patterns of political behavior. For example, among many theorists and activists, the organization of women who protested human rights abuses in Argentina during the years of authoritarian rule came to represent an alternative, collective model of political participation. Dr. Jaquette argues, however, that viewing women's political participation as a means to revolutionize politics fails to address how women can effectively infiltrate and use existing formal political structures to further their access to power. Far from conceptualizing women's movements as inherently oppositional to the State, Dr. Jaquette argues that women should focus on making traditional democratic politics work in their favor.

While agreeing with Dr. Jaquette that women have a role to play within the State apparatus, Dr. Norma Stoltz Chinchilla's presentation, "Women's Movements, Feminist Movements, Political Parties and the State," points out that when women use formal institutions to further their causes, they risk losing their organizational and political autonomy. This does not imply, she argues, that women should distance themselves from formal politics but that women must organize outside of the State as well and create independent organizations that complement and balance the work of State institutions. Dr. Chinchilla outlines the numerous debates that emerge when women have been mobilized around a specific crisis and the crisis comes to an end. These include the appropriateness of asserting gender-specific demands in political fora; whether these demands should be practical demands surrounding economic needs or strategic demands addressing ideological concepts of gender; the importance of creating autonomous female organizations versus working within mixed organizations, and the appropriate degree of cooperation with the State. Chinchilla argues that these tend to be presented as "either-or" propositions when in actuality the maintained political participation of women requires various configurations of demands and organization.

Part II of the working paper looks at the impact of structural adjustment policies on women in Latin America and the kinds of public policies needed to address it. Dr. María de los Angeles Crummett's essay, "Changing Class and Gender Roles After a Decade of Austerity: Rural Households in Calvillo, Aguascalientes, Mexico," describes the disproportionate impact of neoliberal reforms on women. Research in Aguascalientes shows how women assumed additional income-earning activities in order to combat the economic crises of the 1980s and compensate for the migration of working-age men and children. For many women, assuming responsibility for the economic well-being of their households implied the burdens of a double workday, low pay, decreased food intake, and urban migration. Changes in the nature and availability of rural employment and income during the 1980s has increased rural out-migration and altered the economic and social structures of the community. Crummett concludes that policies must address the reality of these transformations and recognize the critical role of women in household income earning.

Mayra Buvinic's essay, "Women's Situation in Latin America and the Caribbean: Recent Trends and Implications for Public Policy" reinforces Crummett's findings that the economic crises of the 1980s and the increased presence of women in the work force have been characterized by a feminization of low-wage work. The number of women in low-paid, unprotected and uncounted work has consistently grown in the last decade. That increase has gone hand in hand with the feminization of poverty: female-headed households are over-represented among the region's poor. Yet, studies have shown that low-income women are more likely than men to invest scarce resources in child well-being once a minimum level of income or earnings has been met. As such, it can be argued that income earned by women yields a higher social benefit than that earned by men. Below a minimum threshold, however, the economic deprivation of poor working women may be transmitted to the next generation as children's health and well-being are affected by reduced child care time. Evidence points to a need for social and economic reforms that reinforce the positive cycle between women's control of income and children's well-being.

The following essays provide a useful analysis of the many issues facing women in the rapidly changing political and economic contexts of Latin America. They represent important contributions to the study of women in the region and the challenges they continue to face.

PART I

WOMEN AND POLITICAL REFORM IN LATIN AMERICA

WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS AND DEMOCRACY IN LATIN AMERICA: SOME UNRESOLVED TENSIONS

Jane S. Jaquette
Occidental College

It is a pleasure to be here at the Latin American Program of the Wilson Center, and to be invited to address a conference that will surely advance our knowledge of how women are participating in post-transition policies in Argentina and in the region. I think the conference organizers should be commended for focusing on this issue, so crucial to the future of democratic politics in Latin America and across the globe.

My remarks today center on two observations which may seem at first glance to be in contradiction with each other: first, that women's social movements made important contributions to the democratic transitions in the region and, second, that the ways in which these movements have evolved and been understood, both in the region and internationally, may be detrimental to the future consolidation of democratic practices. They may also fail to meet the political needs of Latin American women.

I originally thought of calling this talk "Seven Mistaken Theses on Latin American Women's Movements," echoing Rodolfo Stavenhagen's well known criticism of modernization theory. Although the analogy is not exact, there are some important parallels. Stavenhagen argued that capitalism did not work in Latin America the way its defenders said it did, that rosy predictions about the future were thus misleading, and that something needed to be done. I wish to make a similar set of points about our understanding of how women's political participation has developed over the past two decades, though I am not suggesting a "change of structures" so much as a more realistic political approach on the part of women themselves.

I make two assumptions. First, what people do in politics depends a great deal on what they *think* they are doing. Therefore the identification of women's social movements with certain kinds of politics--in this case autonomous and anti-state, non-hierarchical, with women mobilized as "mothers" rather than as "individuals"--affects how women are motivated, how they judge the value of their participation and what it means to build democracy. Second, women do make a difference, even when they are not organized, because women vote.

Women can contribute significantly to democratic institutionalization if they see their participation in this larger context. They can help create functioning party systems, for example, or they can add to the growing number of alienated and volatile voters; they can help forge links between civil society and the state that will meet social needs and hold the state accountable, or they can separate themselves from this process, preserving their identity but depriving the political system of much-needed feedback and even support, where appropriate.

When I was writing my dissertation, over twenty years ago, I was very critical of those who used pluralism as a model for Latin American politics. Thus my position today is a bit ironic; if I sound like I've become a belated fan of Tocqueville, there's some truth to it.

Women's Movements and Democratic Transitions

One correct thesis is that women's movements in Latin America, though building on an active and often forgotten past, have entered a new and unprecedented period of politicization. The history of women's participation in the past--from the Wars of Independence in the early 19th century and the revolutionary movements of this century, to activists in neighborhood organizations seeking better lives for their families, and as advocates of women's emancipation, as the suffrage movement was called in Latin America--is now being recovered (see the works on Brazil by June Hahner; see also Kirkwood 1990 and Miller 1991). It will show a level of organizational skill, quiet heroism and persistence that has gone unrecognized.

Latin American women leaders have also held key international roles, and deserve the credit for insisting that sex discrimination be banned in the language of the Charter, signed in San Francisco in 1945. Latin American women were present in large numbers and with clear agendas in Mexico City, where the first UN Conference on Women was held in 1975.

Women's participation today is different in degree and, I would argue, in kind. The number of women participating in politics, the variety of arenas in which women's participation is significant, and the ways in which women have added both "feminine" and "feminist" perspectives to political debates in virtually all countries in the hemisphere--these are new. Latin American women are part of a worldwide wave of women's mobilization, but they are bringing their own ideas and ways of doing politics to bear; the political experiences of Latin American women are often seen as examples for others to follow.¹

Contemporary women's movements in Latin America owe much of their political visibility and coherence to transition politics, that is to the particular opportunities open to social movements during the period when civil society was organizing to protest military rule. During the late 1970s and in the 1980s, several kinds of women's movements gained political "space." The most famous of these are the human rights movements, led by the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo of Argentina, whose silent marches around the Plaza revealed the state terror and corruption of the military regime. The Madres demanded that their children be returned alive; they put "life" before "politics."

¹On women's movements, see especially Alvarez 1990, Radcliffe and Westwood 1993, and Jelin n.d.. The arguments on the politics of transition are drawn from the introduction and conclusion to Jacqueline 1989. The discussion of women and democracy is from the second edition (Jacquette 1994), subtitled *Participation and Democracy*.

After Mexico City, in part galvanized into action by the UN call for "status of women" reports from its members in preparation for the UN conference in 1975, small groups formed that called themselves feminist. These groups were usually made up of university-educated women and included many who had been members of leftist political parties but who were frustrated by the persistence of highly elitist and hierarchical leadership structures openly hostile to the introduction of gender analysis. In many cases these groups included women who had returned from political exile in Europe and North America and who brought with them direct experience of northern feminist ideas and ways of organizing.

These self-identified feminist groups, though they involved relatively few women, were able to project gender issues into the national political debates that were occurring within the opposition coalitions. Because they were committed to "study-action" forms of organization which sought ties with working class and poor urban women, and because they worked to create a new kind of feminism suitable to Latin American conditions and responding to the political crisis of military authoritarianism which was driving political change in the Southern Cone and Peru, these small groups had an influence far beyond their numbers. These groups developed new kinds of symbolic politics. They cast women's movements as the leading edge of the worldwide rise of new social movements (see especially Escobar and Alvarez 1992); pointed out the causal relationship between authoritarian relations in the family and the persistence of authoritarian politics; and identified the issue of violence against women as one that could--and did--unite women across class lines.

The mass base for women's movements was in the *favelas* and *barriadas* of the cities of the region. Here, women had been organizing for several decades, planning land invasions to establish squatter settlements, agitating for basic urban services such as roads, electricity, transportation, clinics and schools, often in mixed groups with men, but sometimes on their own as well. In the 1980s, women's popular organizations grew rapidly in response to worsening economic conditions. "Don't Buy on Thursday" groups in Argentina, neighborhood organizations fighting for day care in Brazil (so that women could work to make up for lost incomes), and the communal kitchens of Peru were among the most notable examples of women's organizations that were successful in gaining political space to voice new demands. Through their political activity, these groups provided incontrovertible proof that the military's much heralded economic "miracles" had failed. Nor could the military claim that it was defending "traditional values" or "the family" when women had to organize to ensure that their families would survive.

Although these groups involved very different women from all classes with often contrasting agendas, they were able to join together to call for the return to democratic government. In Argentina, Radical candidate Raúl Alfonsín brought the Madres' moral political language into the mainstream, and acknowledged that his electoral victory over the Peronists was due to women's votes. In Brazil,

women organized state- and national-level councils (*conselhos*) of women from the public and private sectors to advise on legislation for women and pioneered the development of police precincts to deal specifically with violence against women (the *delegacias*). In Peru the communal kitchen movement became internationally known for its success at grass-roots organizing, feeding the population at the rate of a million meals a day in Lima by the early 1990s, and in the process making themselves targets for the urban terrorist campaign of *Sendero Luminoso* (see Barrig 1994).

The New Social Movements and Transition Politics

Latin American women's movements contributed in an important way, I believe, to the resurgence of support for democracy in countries where it had been under attack from both the Left and the Right during much of the 20th century. Evidence that these groups were giving voice to new issues and to underrepresented sectors of society raised hopes that, when democracy returned, it would be possible to transcend old patterns of political polarization, and that the positive values of civil society would be carried over into an emerging democratic political arena.

The importance of the new social movements was enhanced by the commitment of many intellectuals to the idea that contemporary movements were indeed "new," that they offered the prospect of a new kind of politics, and that the Latin American movements were part of a broader wave of grass-roots mobilization taking place around the world--in Western Europe, in countries undergoing transition from authoritarian communist rule, in democratizing Third World countries, and even in the United States, where student protesters, environmental groups, and the women's movement were changing the parameters of political life.

Jean Cohen has identified some of the distinguishing features of the new social movements, contrasting the old-style "interest groups" that used "resource mobilization strategies to affect public policy, often for narrow and competitive economic goals," with the new social movements which "focus on grass-roots politics," create "horizontal, directly democratic associations, and target the social domain of civil society rather than the economy or the state" (1985: 667-71). She found that the new social movements were reintroducing the normative dimension of social action into political life.

Indeed, much of women's political practice in Latin America--their insistence on autonomy, their focus on issues of "daily life," their commitment to solidarity rather than instrumental goals, their focus on moral issues, and the effort to maintain "flat" rather than "vertical" leadership--exemplifies the virtues of the new social movements. For some theorists, the rise of new social movements represents a new stage in history. In Jürgen Habermas's view, to take one example, they are a response to the contemporary "crisis of legitimacy" of the conventional structures of power, a defense of the "lifeworld" against the instrumental and statist operations of "functional reason." Postmodernists have cast women's movements in the

liberating role of a "submerged discourse," outside the "metanarrative" of the modern state which has exhausted its liberating potential.²

Latin American women's movements have also been seen as proof that difference feminism, now the dominant form of theoretical feminism in Europe and North America, can work in practice. In this account, the fact that women are motivated to participate in political movements as *mothers*, rejecting a politics of "interests" for the "needs" of family and community, is interpreted to mean that politics can evolve to more humane forms, progressing beyond the "self-interested citizen" of the liberal, Enlightenment model.

For difference feminists, the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo make a compelling case that politicized motherhood can bring a moral dimension to politics and break down the long-standing but artificial barriers between public and private, recasting women's private domestic roles as political. Jennifer Schirmer has characterized the political practices of groups in Guatemala and El Salvador as creating a "collective citizenry of political motherhood," which collapses "Family and Justice" into "one moral domain" (1993: 61). Finding that women's groups organize in "symbolic-cultural" groups rather than in "political-ideological" ones, María-Pilar García Guadilla writes: "I contend that women differ from men as potential political actors and that they have different political impacts on the government and on public opinion according to their strategies, identities, and capacity to transform their demands into new political facts" (1993: 66).

From Transitions to Democracies

My own work has been sympathetic to the different feminist interpretations of the political practices of Latin American women's movements, and especially with their efforts to redefine the place of "interest" in politics. I too have looked for the way in which Latin American women may be developing ways of doing democratic politics that are not just the "articulation" and "aggregation" of *interests*. I have argued that the testimonials from popular women's groups show that self-interested individualism as a political model may explain why women so often seem politically alienated.

I have speculated on why Latin American women seem much more comfortable with the notion of political activism for *others* rather than for themselves, and why they have criticized North American feminism for being selfish and "hedonistic." I have wondered whether "identity based" social movements offer something that "resource mobilization" interest groups do not: an escape from interest-based politics, in both liberal and Marxist terms (as in "class" or "objective" interests).

²This paragraph is a very brief allusion to the postmodern and critical theory approaches to liberalism; see Bar On 1993 and Seidman 1989.

For there is little doubt that, in its usual and even democratic forms, politics is an alien and alienating world to most women, not because (as some researchers have argued) it is too abstract or too complicated, but because it is often perceived as destructively competitive, morally compromising and hostile to those women who do try to enter it through the conventional channels. Part of the desire that women's groups have to remain autonomous is to distance themselves from the corrupting pressures and the competitive power plays that they believe will divert them from their goals and undermine their solidarity. For many reasons, then, it is very appealing to think that there could be alternatives to the masculine politics of dominance, that there are women's ways of "doing politics," to use Julieta Kirkwood's term.

My concern here, however, is that many of the successes of women's movements during the transitions to democracy cannot be sustained, and that women's political mobilization, which should be playing an important role in linking civil society and the state, may instead be turning in on itself. First, many of the political strategies that worked well during the transition are less effective once democracy is reestablished. Under authoritarian rule, the military banned political parties or kept them on a very short leash. Once the transitions were underway, the social movements were able to occupy a public space that would normally have been filled by the political parties. With the rapid expansion of the mass media during the 1970s and 1980s, they also gained unprecedented access to a much expanded, politically aware public who were anticipating radical political change.

At the same time, social movements along with parties were active participants in opposition coalitions, and they were able to offer new agendas from the point of view of the opposition. They did not have to take responsibility for building parliamentary support or for implementing their often ambitious visions. The low profile of the parties and the conditions of opposition politics made symbolic politics seem like real politics, at which women could, and did, succeed. Even today, many argue that the true impact of women's movements in the region has been their success in changing the discourse.

Opposition politics, and the moral failures of military governments (most clearly seen in the Argentine case), made certain strategies successful that would later lose their power. The stunning success of the Madres' nonnegotiable moral demands is perhaps the best example. However, as María del Carmen Feijoó (1989) has pointed out, this strategy is ultimately anti-politics. Democracy requires that differences be negotiated; to insist on a principle of no compromise contradicts the basis on which real democracies have been built.

Carina Perelli (1994) has pointed this out using the example of the policemen's wives in Uruguay who argued that their demands for better wages for their husbands were "nonnegotiable" (on the moral grounds that the needs of *their* children were nonnegotiable). By refusing to recognize that their demands were in fact *interests*, which had to be balanced in the political system with the interests of

other groups (and *their* children), these women undermined, rather than strengthened the democratic process.

Finally, women responded to transition politics for different reasons than they are drawn to "ordinary" politics. It was a period of crisis, both political and economic, a period in which women's moral and practical concerns converged and were expressed in a variety of ways--but always in opposition to military rule and in favor of a democracy that was still an abstract goal. In this sense there was something heroic about women's "doing politics," as women have testified in the many studies that have been done of popular, feminist, and human rights groups.

The return to democracy has changed all that. Now parties have returned to center stage, recapturing most of the political space. Political agendas must go through the party system, either directly (in terms of new laws or rewritten constitutions) or in terms of bureaucratic directives. In Brazil, the feminist agenda, which was being promoted through the *conselhos*, lost ground when the party that had originally supported it (in the state of São Paulo) lost an election, and was further displaced when President José Sarney undercut the National Council (which up to that time been effective in getting its proposals into the 1988 constitution). Similarly, SERNAM, the National Service for Women in Chile, was weakened by conservative appointments and by the willingness of the leftist parties to negotiate away women's demands within the governing coalition.

Solidarity and the appeal of being part of a soon-to-be successful opposition motivated large numbers of women to overcome traditional barriers and become activists. It is less clear that women mobilized to solidary, opposition politics will find "interest group politics" equally appealing. Women have achieved "space" and "a voice"; the issue is whether they can keep from losing the ground they have already won.

North American democratic experience would suggest that, for groups to continue to have their voices heard, they must create durable organizations that can keep their agenda before parties, legislators, and the news media and help design and then lobby for specific legislation and monitor its implementation. "Flat" leadership structures do not create durable organizations, and the desire for autonomy can result in marginalization. "Self-help" programs take the pressure off the state to provide essential social services. To change these patterns will require changes in perception, including some acceptance of hierarchical leadership to gain accountability and sustainable organization; the need for money and volunteer work (which suggests a need to mobilize middle-class women as well as the salutary focus on working-class women and the urban poor); and a sense of purpose which will carry participants through often mundane activities needed for ongoing organizational survival and success.

If this sounds, perhaps depressingly, like "interest group pluralism," I can only answer that the situation in which Latin American women's groups find themselves today does suggest that women must address themselves, if not to

creating pluralism, then to creating some of the institutions that will perform the functions of interest groups in open democracies. Had women been organized to fight Sarney's withdrawal of support from the feminists on the National Council, he might have acted differently. Had progressive women's movements in Chile mobilized in the streets and in the legislative corridors, SERNAM would have been less easy prey to those male politicians who argued, without fear of political contradiction, that "most women" did not support a feminist agenda.

I have reluctantly come to believe that the images and motivations for activism that are encouraged by new social movements theory on the one hand, and by difference feminism on the other, are not well suited to the needs of democratic politics. I am not the only person who has expressed concern about the political trajectory of the new social movements. Giorgio Alberti (1993) has observed that when movement politics are successful, they "tend to be associated with unanimity and plebiscitarian tendencies," and, when unsuccessful, with fragmentation. Either way it is "an impediment to the consolidation of an organized pattern of interaction between differentiated interests and groups." Noting that political parties are under attack almost everywhere, he finds the space between the state and society is almost a *tabula rasa*.

A few commentators have also raised questions about women's strategies. Annie Dandavati (1992) concludes her study of Chilean women by asking what concrete results can women point to from their success at symbolic politics. In a recent article in the feminist philosophy journal, *Hypatia*, Griselda Gutiérrez Castañeda observes that feminism is being put in the impossible position of being "the new social movement called on to solve all the vices of the existing political parties" and warns that "we run the risk of promoting deeply naive positions, philosophically speaking, as well as politically erroneous and ineffective ones, by blocking the conquest of new spaces and the strengthening of our organizations" (1994: 186, 191).

Social movements do not relish changing their view that "ordinary politics" is neither morally nor practically worthwhile; and the notion of a politics based on a plethora of organizations that "articulate interests" is not well grounded in Latin American political culture or history, as we all know very well. I recognize that a solution based on a North American interest group model may not be adequate to the political needs and experiences of Latin American women, and I am not suggesting that they be adopted wholesale or unmodified.

But it is worth thinking about how women can be more politically effective and how they can be part of a process that strengthens, rather than weakens, the democratic process and links civil society in all its heterogeneity to a responsive and responsible state. In my view, neither difference feminism nor the prescriptions of new social movements theory addresses these issues.

Luce Irigaray has remarked that women see and understand themselves through a "masculine imaginary." I think that a new "political imaginary" for

women is needed that can combine the virtues of solidarity with the effectiveness of interest groups, that uses autonomy to keep a critical distance but not to reject out of hand the possibilities of reform and women's active involvement in it, and that recognizes that ordinary democratic politics, though rarely heroic, are crucial to women.

Further, *women are crucial to democracy*--not only to the representativeness and accountability of democratic institutions but to the substance of the social policy that will come out of those institutions in the coming decades. Women's politicization during the last twenty years has been remarkable, but it is fragile and women could easily fall back into cynicism or withdrawal. Women's movements face a greater challenge today than ever before. It is the challenge to create full citizenship for women and responsive democracy for all.

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WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS, FEMINIST MOVEMENTS, POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE STATE

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I have followed women's issues and women's movements in Latin America--particularly Chile, Brazil, Mexico, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala--for over a decade. My most in-depth knowledge comes from Nicaragua, where I have been in contact with activist women and women's groups throughout the decade in which the Sandinistas were in power and now that the Chamorro government is in power. Thus, the strongest influences on my thinking about these issues in recent years has come from the experiences of women in the Central American context--particularly, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

There are many historical, cultural, and social differences among all the Latin American countries. However, I think that some of the theoretical, political, and strategic issues that arise when women begin to interject gender-specific demands into the political discourse and onto the political agenda--particularly when those demands include a critique of gender inequalities (that is, what I would call feminist demands)--transcend differences among countries. The exact translation of the issues may be different in different contexts, but I would suggest that the political challenges and dilemmas are, to a certain degree, universal.

It seems to be a "law of history"--if in fact there are any laws left, which the postmodernists say there are not--that no matter how massively, visibly, and significantly women have mobilized on behalf of a cause when the nation or some set of national interests is in crisis, there is always pressure on women afterwards to return to their previous roles in daily life and reduce or minimize their active participation in the public (especially political) sphere. This is the case whether that crisis be resistance to attack (or perceived attack) by an external aggressor on the nation or national sovereignty, mobilization to overthrow a repressive domestic government, or attempts to bring about a revolution for greater democracy and social justice. In other words, no matter how heroic, saluted, and celebrated women have been during the crisis, no matter how "nontraditional" their roles during the crisis might have been, there is often an unspoken assumption that the restoration of "normalcy" means a return to the status quo where gender relations are concerned or, conversely, that implicit promises for greater gender equality will eventually be honored if women wait patiently and politely.

While some women understand and accept that the expansion of their roles and opportunities during periods of crisis is temporary, other women enter the struggle believing or become convinced along the way that women deserved more equality relative to men. Some attempt openly to resist pressures to "send them back to the kitchen," while others, tired from the struggle and the conflicts that continued resistance might generate, willingly or reluctantly return to their former

lives. In other words, the momentum that women develop in politics and society during a crisis--whether from the vantage point of the household, the family, the church, schools, offices, marketplaces, government institutions, or the streets--is difficult to maintain once the crisis is over.

The dilemma and challenge, therefore, is how can permanent transformations be made in the powers and opportunities for large numbers of women and not just for the "amazing few" who truly dedicate their lives to that kind of change?

The simple answer is that women need to find ways to keep themselves connected and organized wherever in society they are located. And society, or particular institutions within it, such as political parties, need to create or concede "political space" in their structures, processes, and ideologies for women to discover, analyze, and put forward their gender-specific needs and demands. Of course, the solution is never that simple, because a number of other issues and questions arise in the attempt to make this happen. Since the issues are not always clear, I will pose them more as questions with some thoughts about answers rather than pretending to give definitive formulas which, in any event, would probably be invalid or, at least, misleading.

When women in political parties, labor unions, state agencies, and other social institutions and social sector organizations (such as students, professionals, slum-dwellers, etc.) gather to discuss their roles and views, one of the first and most important questions that emerges is whether or not it is really important to put forth gender-specific demands in their organization, institution, or social movement, or whether women should simply subscribe to general goals and agendas and demonstrate "in practice" their value to and importance for the cause.

If women do agree that they should put forth gender-specific demands, the next question that emerges is what kind of demands? Should they be restricted to the situations and needs that women face in their daily lives as a result of attempting to carry out existing roles (what some have called "practical gender demands"), such as how to get food on the table, get access to clinics and affordable health care, improve schools and play areas for children, make the neighborhood cleaner and safer, etc? Or should they focus on, or at least include, critiques of existing women's roles and the inequalities that are often embodied in them (unequal access to power and economic, social, and cultural resources, etc.)? Should women analyze and critique the ideology that justifies gender inequality, that is, those conceptions of male and female that make their way into public policies and educational systems? In other words, should they talk about what some scholars and activists have called "strategic gender demands" or what might be commonly understood as "feminist" demands?

While not everyone has the same definition of "feminist," my definition here is broad and general: a feminist perspective is one that embodies an explicit critique of gender hierarchies, some notion of where such hierarchies come from or

on what they are based, and strategies or proposals for overcoming them. Given this broad and rather inclusive definition, and given the emergence of a distinctly Latin American version of "second wave" feminism, it may be surprising to some that the inclusion of a feminist perspective in women's agendas or demands is still a controversial issue in 1994. But it remains a controversial issue because the economic crisis in Latin America has deepened over the last decade and some people, including some women activists in Nicaragua who formerly seemed more receptive to feminism, argue that women should focus on immediate issues of poverty and the economy rather than "more utopian" and potentially divisive issues of gender inequality.

Given the important advances Nicaraguan women activists made in getting women's issues and demands legitimated during the Sandinista period, one might assume that all, or at least most, Sandinista women activists supported the inclusion of both practical and strategic gender demands, platforms, agendas, manifestos, and work plans. But since the Sandinista Front's electoral loss, a split has developed between women activists from AMNLAE, the Sandinista-affiliated women's organization, who believe that women's groups should focus on survival issues (given the rapidly deteriorating economy), and other women activists (inside and outside Sandinista organizations), who believe that demands for greater gender equality, organizational autonomy, and democracy can be integrated with issues of daily survival. The former believe that critiques should be directed towards the government in power, while the latter believe that internal critiques of Sandinista party practices with respect to women and other grass-roots groups are also in order.

The split has surprised some observers because during the last part of the war against the Contras, when the Sandinistas were still in power, the more explicitly feminist position seemed to have won official support. That view had argued that, while conditions did not exist in Nicaragua for women and men to be equal in every sphere, it was at least possible to talk openly about the ideology that justifies male domination and male privilege, even in the middle of a war, when the broadest possible unity was important. They argued that women needed to be offered something in return for their support for and sacrifices on behalf of the war effort. That "something" did not always have to be material gains. Equally important were educational campaigns among the soldiers on issues of domestic violence and acceptance of women in the non-traditional roles some had assumed while the men were fighting at the front. These activists agreed to support the war effort and even drop some of the other demands they might have pushed for but wanted something in return; they did not want to just go back to the same old situation. The Sandinista leadership appeared to have accepted what I would call this more feminist argument. But now, with the war over and the Front out of power, there seems to be a reversion to what might be called a more "economistic" view of women's organizing. So the issue is still a controversial one: some feel that raising issues of sexism and organizational autonomy divides and takes energy away from the movement; others believe that it will ultimately strengthen it.

I am now convinced that women and the social movements of which they are a part must put forth demands for ideological and cultural changes and equal access to power, or at least demands that these issues be openly and honestly discussed; it is when this is *not* done that the movement becomes divided and energy is taken away from it. This is what results when women simply go about their daily lives and "leave politics to the men." Women may not express their decisions in explicitly feminist terms; they may simply say they do not have time for politics. But the real reason they do not participate is because they are not being offered any hope for change, any dream that their daughters' worlds will be any different.

Another issue that comes up in the interaction among women's groups, political parties, and the state is the issue of "political space." How important is it that women have some degree of autonomy--political, organizational, and ideological as well as personal--within mixed (male-female) organizations? Is it important that women in a political party be able to meet together without the men to discuss what bothers them, what they would like to change, what they would like to demand of the party, and to network and bond with each other? The suggestion that women be guaranteed this political space is still seen as threatening in many places. Some men worry about what women will discuss in their absence; they think that the women will discuss them, and they find that disturbing. There are also many women who are not sure they want to meet with other women without the men present. They say such meetings may lead to division and create antagonism because the men will become suspicious and not trust them.

Men have been meeting by themselves for years, and they have been meeting informally--in bars and other sorts of places where they bond and exchange ideas with each other. I think some degree of autonomy for women, including in mixed organizations (or perhaps most importantly in mixed organizations), is necessary. There is no need to be purist, idealist, or absolutist about it, but if women do not talk to each other without the men present they never discover to what extent their problems are shared. They continue to think they are having individual problems that they must solve individually when really they are dealing with collective and shared problems. Believing that social problems are individual problems is another burden that women carry when they do not have the right conditions in which to communicate with each other. Even if the problems discussed cannot be totally solved--within the social movement, political party, or state agency--breaking the silence about them has the same potentially healing and even empowering effect as breaking the silence in a dysfunctional family. And there are always immediate, short-term steps toward a solution that can be taken, such as education or acknowledging the problem in a program or platform.

Every political party, social sector group, and institution should allow for the possibility of a women's caucus or some other type of space in which women can meet and discuss--not necessarily a physical space, such as an office, but some place or forum where women can build trust with each other. Without such a space, as

one Central American feminist commented at the First Central American Women's Encounter in Montelimar, Nicaragua, those who are passive and submissive can be divided off from the rebels; thus, the rebels get isolated and stigmatized and the rest of the women are too scared to speak up in their defense.

A third issue for women with an explicit feminist perspective is what is the best strategy for advancing a feminist agenda within the social movement that they support; that is, will they get farther faster working within mixed organizations or outside of them in women-only groups and projects? This is a hot topic in Central America where a number of women have given their energies to mixed organizations (affiliated with revolutionary movements) for over a decade. Some of these women are feeling "burned" and are bitter that, despite their dedication and loyalty (often beginning at the age of 13 or 14), feminist ideas, strategies, and programs are still not solidly rooted in the movement and can still be easily relegated to the back burner.

Other women in those mixed organizations, however, feel that important gains have been made and still can be made by struggling for change from within. They point out that such organizations are still the gathering place for the activists they need to influence.

In my view, this should not be seen as an "either-or" question. A feminist agenda needs women both in organizations with an explicitly feminist focus and in ones in which feminist demands or programs are mixed in with other demands. Women should organize wherever they feel comfortable, effective, and useful doing so. This may change from time to time in different stages of a movement or even in a woman's life. There are times when women feel they need a woman-only setting, one which is more nurturing and supportive and which might even include some spirituality, ritual, and/or healing. Women who feel they need such an environment should be encouraged to seek or create it. On the other hand, women who are in mixed organizations have access to some political, social, and economic resources that women in women-only organizations might not have. They may have daily contact with the male comrades they want as allies and supporters and may find it easier to win their sympathy because of the activities that they share. Women within such organizations can coalesce and demand their share of power from within.

The important thing is that women inside and outside mixed organizations find ways to maintain a dialogue and work together in coalitions. In theory, at least, a feminist agenda can be advanced anywhere, though in practice this might not be the case. It depends not so much on the type of organization but on how much support it can gather, where its members are at in their own lives and consciousnesses, and what has happened in the movement previously.

A fourth question is: How should women's movements and feminist movements regard the state? Is the state friend or foe?

As Jane Jaquette has said, many feminists have long regarded the state with suspicion, if not outright mistrust. But what happens when a political party or social movement gains direct access to the state? What happens when a government comes into power and wants to appoint women activists to government positions and proposes to address some of the issues that women have raised? The reality is that whether the state is friend or foe may change over time. In the case of Brazil, for example, the state under the dictatorship was commonly perceived by feminists to be their worst enemy; then, when the dictatorship was overthrown, it was viewed as a friend. It is not uncommon to be faced with a dilemma seemingly overnight; that is, a group or movement may have become very adept at opposition politics and then, suddenly, it is invited in by the state, invited to influence it, and not much thought may have been given up to that point to concrete alternative proposals and strategies. It may be disorienting to be welcomed into a place that was thought hostile. And making proposals for programs and policies to be implemented by the state requires careful thinking because, historically, progressive change often gets co-opted by the state. In other words, sometimes just by incorporating women's and/or feminist demands into state discourse and agendas, the movement outside the state (i.e., in civil society) demobilizes or falls apart because the rallying point has disappeared or become less focused.

On the other hand, women may be welcomed in by the state at the very time that things are falling apart in the economy or society and they may end up sharing the blame for problems not getting solved. Women are often invited to share power or status when there is little of either to share. Why not let women try to do something when there is little money to adequately fund programs or when the feeling is that things are in such a mess that women could not possibly make it any worse? It is discouraging, on the one hand, and on the other, there is really no choice--when economic times are bad and families are suffering, women feel they must do something.

So women have to be clear that, even if they are invited in, even if the state poses as a friend to women, the state is still patriarchal, racist, and--in most of the Third World today--wedded to neoliberal economic policies. On the other hand, there is power to be had in having access to the state and there are always ways in which that power can be used. I think the most important thing is to make sure that there is a strong women's movement outside the state. There may be women activists and programs inside the state, but there must be groups and structures outside that have as much autonomy as possible so they can hold the state accountable and can serve as critics and pressure groups. Such structures and groups can keep programs from being distorted or derailed and can bargain and negotiate.

Another way to make the state work on behalf of women may be to focus on local power, on municipal and regional governments, as many women's groups have in Brazil. By focusing on the local level, without neglecting the federal government, it is easier to keep grass-roots organizations strong; participation is

usually greater when women do not have to travel any great distance from their homes and do not have to imagine something that is far away from their daily realities.

Finally, within women's movements and feminist movements, it is important, when dictatorships give way to democracies, that nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations (NGOs) not be allowed to substitute themselves for a women's movement; there is a tendency for this to take place in Latin America. NGOs tend to have paid professionals who devote their full time to women's projects, and this is good; but if that is all there is, the NGO professionals can become an interest group themselves, and their voices and interests may begin to substitute for those of their constituencies. Grass-roots women's organizations with direct membership and leadership need also to be given access to coalitions and the state in order to keep the NGOs honest and to complement their work.

Magali Piñeda, a long-time Dominican feminist activist, observed at a conference recently that feminists are always going back and forth between what they want, what they wish they could have, and what is possible. She argued that feminists should continue to pursue what is possible in the current context but should not negate or stop talking about their dreams. We should think of our dreams, she said, as something possible to realize, even while working on that which is more immediately attainable.

I would like to add that I think we should give new thought to ways in which women and women's groups can subvert bureaucracies to advance women's interests. Women show great creativity in how to subvert institutions--they learn it in the family, an institution in which inequalities exist but which women nevertheless subvert to their benefit.

During the Sandinista government period in Nicaragua, I watched Sandinista feminist women, who were in the minority among Sandinista militants, act to subvert the party, the bureaucracy, and the public dialogue to make sure that issues important to them had an opportunity to be discussed. They would use their sources, for example, to find out in advance when topics they felt strongly about were going to be discussed by the National Directorate (which was, of course, made up entirely of men). Then, seemingly out of the blue, a public debate would appear, with articles in *Barricada* and women bringing up the issues in their local assemblies and in "Meet the Public" encounters between Sandinista leaders and the people. The National Directorate was faced with a public discussion of issues, such as reproductive rights, that they had said Nicaraguan women were not interested in. It is true that some women in Nicaraguan grass-roots organizations were not interested in discussing these issues, but for others they were very important; the Sandinista feminists had to wage minor guerrilla warfare to assure that the range of women's concerns and positions were allowed to enter the public discourse.

Women who engaged in these invisible campaigns talk about them now that the party is out of power, but at the time, when they occupied middle level positions

in party leadership or had responsibilities in the bureaucracy, they might have been disciplined by their party had it been known. Their strength came from having many contacts and a widespread information-gathering system. In other words, the solidarity among like-minded women in different parts of the society proved to be a valuable resource.

One of their strategies that was more intentionally public was the formation of a tongue-in-cheek political party they called the "Party of the Erotic Left." The idea for the party emerged among Nicaraguan women activists who attended the IV Latin American Feminist Encuentro held in Taxco, Mexico, in 1987, where it became evident that a Latin American version of feminism was emerging as an important force in the hemisphere. Frustrated by what they perceived to be the rigidity of their party in responding to initiatives "from the bottom up" and the reluctance of some traditional leftist party leaders to respond to new ideas about women's identities and sexuality, the women announced they had created a new party with themselves as charter members. The pretend party also constituted a playful challenge to the Sandinista Party's claim to be the only party of the Sandinista Revolution. They got their point across quickly and visibly. A more serious debate within the party would have been more difficult to launch at that particular time and certainly would have taken a long time to become visible.

What this shows, I think, is how creative symbols and media campaigns, including ones done with humor, can get a point across. Another example is from the United States and has to do with getting more women promoted and tenured on college campuses, where they have historically had difficulty getting ahead. After years of trying to improve conditions by pressuring from within at the medical school of the University of California, Irvine, sympathetic faculty helped to organize a community group made up of prominent people in the local area. Once this off-campus group became interested in the problem--especially some of the wealthy women who were perceived to be potential contributors to the college--the university began to sit up and take notice to a greater degree than they had when the pressure had come only from inside the institution. To me, this is another example of how women can wage subtle guerrilla warfare from without as well as from inside institutions to advance women's interests. We have only just begun to explore ways to subvert public policies or discourses in the interest of women.

PART II

WOMEN AND THE IMPACT OF STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT

CHANGING CLASS AND GENDER ROLES AFTER A DECADE OF AUSTERITY: RURAL HOUSEHOLDS IN CALVILLO, AGUASCALIENTES, MEXICO¹

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1. Introduction

Throughout the decade of the 1980s, the vast majority of people in Latin America and the Caribbean experienced the devastating effects of "la crisis." High rates of inflation, widespread unemployment and underemployment, and deep cuts in public expenditures on essential services depressed living standards to pre-1970 levels. Structural adjustment programs backed by the International Monetary Fund and adopted by the Mexican government, including wage and hiring freezes, privatization of state-owned enterprises, and trade liberalization, further weakened the economic standing of the poor and middle classes.

A host of scholarly works have documented the enormous socioeconomic consequences of Latin America's "lost decade" (see, for example, Wyman 1983; González Casanova and Aguilar Camín 1985; Levy and Szekely 1987; Cornia et al. 1987; González de la Rocha and Escobar Latapi 1991). The extensive research on this topic has resulted in two important findings: first, macroeconomic adjustment programs are not gender-neutral, either in operation or in effect (Gladwin 1992). Women (and their children) bore the brunt of structural reforms that cut social expenditures, markedly increased unemployment, and privatized large segments of the national economy. Adjustment measures generally hit women harder than men because of long-standing gender inequities in the household, in the labor market, and in society as a whole.

Second, while families and communities responded in myriad ways to the crisis (e.g., collective kitchens and extended family networks), the household unit played a pivotal role in cushioning the impact of the crisis on the well-being of the population. For example, Lourdes Benería's (1992) analysis of Mexico City's populous *colonias* or neighborhoods finds that the daily struggle for survival was centered in the family. Mercedes González de la Rocha (1991) reaches a similar conclusion in her study of poor urban households in Guadalajara: rather than take to the streets to protest ever-worsening economic conditions, the poorest social sectors responded to the crisis by intensifying household strategies for survival.

There is also ample evidence from throughout the region that within the household women were at the forefront of strategies aimed at maintenance and survival of the domestic unit (Cornia et al. 1987; García and Gomariz 1989; Tarres 1989; Arriagada 1990; Deere et al. 1990; Aguiar 1990; Benería 1992). Briefly, the

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severity of the drop in real monetary incomes during the 1980s, particularly among male heads of household, had the effect of increasing economic participation rates of inactive household members. As formal sector wage work became increasingly unstable, households attempted to diversify their sources of income as well as to incorporate as many members as possible into the labor market. The intensification of the work effort fell largely upon women, although children were also incorporated into this process (González de la Rocha 1993).

At the same time, the crisis had major repercussions on daily family life, resulting in an increase in the number and often length of activities that make up domestic work (Benería 1992). Women increased their domestic labor in order to save and used these savings to protect basic food needs. Nevertheless, food consumption patterns changed significantly, both in terms of the amounts spent and the amounts bought. In short, because women are primarily responsible for meeting basic domestic needs such as food preparation, general household maintenance, family health care, and child and elder care, reduced public expenditures on social services placed tremendous burdens on women's work within the household (Deere et al. 1990; Arriagada 1990; Mulhern and Mauze 1992; González de la Rocha 1993).

While the literature on women and the economic crisis in Latin America is substantial, few studies have examined how recession and adjustment have altered gender roles *and* social classes over time. To be sure, several notable studies have analyzed how the crisis has affected different household members and its differential impact by gender and age (Benería 1992; Moser 1989; González de la Rocha 1991). These studies, however, were mainly concerned with gender dynamics operating at the level of a single social sector--poor or low-income households in an urban setting. The impact of the crisis on rural households and families has been less well researched.

What has been the impact of the 1980s downturn in a sector long characterized by growing landlessness, food dependency, and high levels of internal and international migration? Did the crisis of the 1980s significantly worsen already precarious living standards in the countryside? What has been the effect of "modernizing" efforts on different socioeconomic classes in the rural sector? How did households cope with the negative effects of the crisis?

In the present paper, I examine the adaptive responses of rural households in the *municipio* of Calvillo, Aguascalientes, Mexico, to the decade-long economic recession. The paper links the effects of the crisis and neoliberal policies to changes in the rural class structure in Calvillo, as well as changes in the division of labor by gender in households. Drawing from a 1982 sample survey of 56 households² and a

² The 1982 Calvillo study forms part of a larger survey of over 200 households in three distinct agricultural zones in Aguascalientes. See Crummett (1984) for a discussion of sampling procedures and an analysis of the survey region.

follow-up survey of these same households carried out in 1991, the argument proceeds as follows: the deregulation of guava production, the main commercial crop in the region, altered the class structure in Calvillo. It marginalized small-scale commercial producers and thereby reduced income opportunities for subsistence farmers and the landless. This restructuring and increased unemployment, in turn, affected the income attainment strategies of households such that women increased their participation in wage labor and male migration to the United States jumped dramatically. Finally, women's greater burden for the welfare of their households led to major changes in the economic and social stability of the household unit.

An overview of the survey region is presented in Section 2. Section 3 analyzes the effects of deregulation on Calvillo's agrarian class structure and the household division of labor. Section 3 documents the gendered nature of households' survival strategies and considers the impact of these strategies on women's remunerated work and their contributions to household income. A final section summarizes the main findings of the paper.

2. The Region

Calvillo, located in the southwest corner of the state of Aguascalientes, is perhaps best known in Mexico for the production of two very different goods: guava and embroidered handicrafts.

In the 1950s and 1960s, a group of farmers in Calvillo consolidated their landholdings in order to undertake the commercial exploitation of guava. Private and public bank credit financed the construction of dams and other irrigation systems; improved strains of guava, insecticides, herbicides, chemical fertilizers and other agro-inputs, most subsidized by the state, became essential ingredients in the production process. Calvillo's entrepreneurs came mainly from the small proprietor class (*pequeños propietarios*). By the early 1970s, they had brought guava production into full swing: Calvillo became the most important producer of guava in Mexico, accounting for two-thirds of national output and 30 percent of the state's agricultural income (Instituto Nacional de Investigaciones Agrarias 1980).

Guava has also been a major provider of seasonal wage employment in the region. During the harvest period, which extends from late September through early February, laborers from the region's landless and smallholder populations (comprised of *ejidatarios* and sharecroppers), pick, sort, and pack the fruit. During the off-season, workers head north across the U.S.-Mexican border in search of agricultural or service-sector work.

Although Aguascalientes is an important, if not sizable, producer of a vast array of textiles and garments, the industry first gained national recognition for its *bordados* and *deshilados*, intricate hand- and machine-embroidered articles including women and children's clothing, tablecloths, napkins, and other household articles. Both items, *bordados* and *deshilados*, originate in the rural communities of Calvillo. For generations, women have embroidered goods for

personal consumption and to meet demand from other rural households in the region. For some time now, however, embroidery production has been organized under the auspices of industrial capital. As is common in this type of industry, intermediaries or subcontractors working for regional and national firms deliver the primary materials and pick up the finished product (Crummett 1988). Women homeworkers in Calvillo are subject to extreme exploitation: they work for piece rates far below the legal minimum, work is irregular, piece rates are unpredictable, and social benefits are nonexistent.

Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, guava, migration, and *maquila* typified the work patterns of Calvillo's smallholding and landless households. A traditional division of labor by gender circumscribed the employment opportunities available to women and men. Men and older male children worked in the guava fields, and temporary cyclical migration to the United States overwhelmingly drew away sons and male heads of households. *Maquila* employed women; almost all female children from the age of seven or eight were involved in *maquila*. Overall, more than 75 percent of smallholder and landless households in the 1982 agrarian survey of Calvillo depended on either guava or *maquila* for employment and half of these households sent migrants to the United States on a regular basis.

Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, these three activities represented a critical means to maintain the economic and social viability of the household. During the period of temporary male migration to the United States, homework became the primary source of household income. Even though *maquila* earnings constituted approximately one-third of total income among landless households, for example, the availability of year-round, albeit poorly remunerated, work in *maquila* meant that basic needs were being met in the interim before remittances arrived. Moreover, the nature of *maquila*--paid work in the home--enabled child care and other household tasks to be performed alongside work for wages (Crummett 1988: 20).

3. Deregulation, Rural Stratification, and the Gender Division of Labor

By the early 1990s, all three activities had undergone major transformations with important implications for Calvillo's rural class structure as well as household production, income, and most notably, women's roles in the gender division of labor. First, the attempt to implement market-oriented policies in agriculture led the government to reduce price supports on key agricultural inputs as well as abandon its longstanding support of agrarian programs providing subsidized capital, credit, and other resources to small farmers (Arias and Durand 1990; Stanford 1991; Appendini 1991). In Calvillo, these measures had the effect, at least in the short run, of squeezing the productive capacity of small and medium guava growers. For example, electricity for irrigation, a major cost of production for farmers (guava trees require weekly irrigation nine months out of the year), has seen its price increase 142 times since 1983 (Calva n.d.). In 1991 alone, electricity for irrigation rose more than 400 percent.

Subsidies have also been lifted on other agricultural inputs and equipment. Consequently, there has been a steady increase in the cost of tractors, fuel, fertilizers, pesticides, and other inputs needed for production (Calva n.d.). Although the price per kilo of guava has fluctuated widely over the decade, it has not kept pace with price increases in production inputs. To be sure, overproduction in Calvillo and increasing competition from producers elsewhere in Mexico account in large part for depressed prices for the fruit crop. Nonetheless, growers argue that the government's abrupt removal of price supports for key agricultural inputs, especially electricity for irrigation, is the main culprit behind the present crisis in guava.

Although no recent macrolevel data are available to discern the impact of market deregulation on guava, my own data suggest that these measures have concentrated production in the hands of a few, large agricapitalists that account for the greater share of commercial production. Small private farmers, traditionally the backbone of guava cultivation, have sustained significant, if not permanent, losses with the removal of state subsidies. For example, all six households identified as "small proprietor" in the 1982 survey³ (or 11.3 percent of the total number of households), were on the verge of bankruptcy in 1991.⁴ Initially, these households attempted to remain competitive by taking entire groves out of production (the closing of just one irrigation well--shared by many growers--eliminates the jobs of approximately 500 workers), or by introducing labor-saving equipment into the production process (one mechanical weeder, for example, replaces five laborers). Overall, Rojas Nieto (1989) estimates that by the end of the 1980s nearly half of all jobs in guava had been eliminated.

Ten years ago, these guava producers clearly pertained to the upper stratum of rural households in terms of access to the means of production, the extensive use of wage labor, the value of agricultural output, and the level of household income. In terms of monetary income alone, Table 1 shows that in 1982 small proprietor units on average earned nearly ten times more than subsistence households. To some extent, these households have maintained their economic standing in the community by employing reproduction strategies more typical of their less well-off neighbors: they have diversified income sources and increased the number of family members in the labor market. Significantly, in 1982 this stratum did not hire out labor; rather total monetary income was derived from production on the land. In 1991, however, wage labor, both local and migratory, was prevalent throughout this class while income from guava was virtually nonexistent for at least the last two production cycles.

³ See Crummett (1987) for methodology employed in determining the three major class categories (commercial, subsistence, and landless), in the Calvillo survey.

⁴ Percentages are based on a total of 53 households rather than the original sample of 56. One respondent declined to be reinterviewed in 1991 and two other households no longer existed because elderly members had died in the interim.

In 1991, two other notable features characterized the upper stratum of landholding households--indebtedness and decapitalization. On the one hand, the lack of public-sector credit has put small producers at the mercy of moneylenders charging exorbitant rates of interest. In order to repay debts, farmers have had to seriously deplete their capital stocks by selling trucks, tractors, and other farm equipment. The lack of productive resources has in turn further restricted employment of hired labor. On the other hand, half of the small proprietor units in the survey reported the need to sell household assets including livestock, furniture, and major appliances in order to meet living expenses.

For "subsistence" households (37.7 percent of rural households), the other landed class identified in the 1982 agrarian survey of Calvillo, the decade of the eighties heralded critical changes in almost every aspect of work and family life. Not only did household members from this social sector increase their participation in income-earning activities but they also altered their consumption patterns, significantly reducing the purchase of food, clothing, medicine, and other basic necessities. For example, in the majority of subsistence households, meals consisted of beans and tortillas (in a few cases beans and chile), and little else. Although these food items constitute the traditional diet of Mexico's rural population, households stated that they were consuming less of these foods than in previous years and eliminating even the occasional intake of meat and other animal protein. One respondent, Doña Juana, put it this way: "A kilo of meat costs \$16,000 pesos and for that amount the whole family can eat beans for a week."

Like the small proprietors, the subsistence sector has attempted to forestall its economic decline by taking on high levels of debt. Sixty-two percent of households reported to be heavily in debt to either relatives or local moneylenders. Debt was taken on in order to finance an international migrant, to purchase or lease an industrial sewing machine (for *maquila* embroidery), or to pay for major medical expenses. For a significant number of rural households, however, acquiring credit was a means to pay for immediate consumption items: 24.6 percent of households stated that they requested credit from the neighborhood grocery store on a weekly basis just in order to eat.

For subsistence producers, the brunt of adjustment policies has largely been felt through the labor rather than the product market. Among these households, plots are so small (on average 2.9 hectares) and of such poor quality that they cannot absorb the family labor force nor produce a surplus for sale on the market. Consequently, higher prices for basic food crops, maize and beans, have been of little economic assistance to Calvillo's smallholder households. In fact, Calvillo's subsistence producers are net buyers of food crops, such that price increases for agricultural goods have had the effect of worsening household income and consumption levels.

In general, Calvillo's smallholder households have persisted over time by their extensive involvement in wage labor. In 1982, the subsistence sector derived

over three-fourths of its total income from wages (primarily in agriculture and *maquila*). And although the proportion of wage income to total income did not change significantly between 1982 and 1991, real wages for agricultural work decreased by almost 50 percent between 1981 and 1988 (Calva n.d.).

The combination of growing land pressure, declining money wages, and more restricted opportunities in agricultural wage work, especially for men, has had two important consequences: first, households have expanded the types and number of income-generating activities in which they engage. Second, given the nature of employment opportunities, particularly in the United States,⁵ and the gender division of labor within the household, men from this class are migrating in ever-larger numbers, as women remain behind to maintain land rights (see section 4). Accordingly, women are increasingly responsible for the economic welfare of their families. From taking in more piecework to selling animal stocks, to marketing small surpluses produced by these households, to taking in laundry, to working in domestic service, women of the poor peasantry have sought out myriad ways in which to meet their households' most basic life needs.

Children, and particularly older daughters, have also played a critical role in household reproduction strategies. Daughters comprised the majority of homeworkers in both the 1982 and 1991 surveys and, in the period 1990-91, entered the traditionally male occupation of wage work in the guava orchards.

Thus, the economic crisis of the 1980s led women from this sector to increase their income-earning activities. This work largely consisted of activities seen as extensions of their domestic role, although in some cases they entered "male" occupations, such as management of the landholding and agricultural wage work. On the other hand, as the role of men as primary economic providers declined, they did not seek employment outside of a fairly narrow range of activities in which they were engaged prior to the crisis--guava, agricultural wage work, and migration. In spite of women's (and children's) increased contribution to household income, lower returns to female labor mean that women are working in more kinds of activities than their male counterparts, yet total household income has fallen over the last decade. They remain among the most impoverished groups in rural Aguascalientes.

Although lacking means of production, landless households, comprising the majority of households in the survey (51 percent), were significantly better off in economic terms than subsistence producers at the time of the first survey. In fact, in 1982 the landless had fewer wage earners per household yet average net income was almost double that of smallholder households. (Table 1 provides a breakdown of average gross weekly earnings by class.) In 1991, however, this social sector had itself undergone a process of differentiation where at least two distinct groups emerged:

⁵ For analysis of the changes in the U.S. economy that have affected the demand for Mexican immigrant labor see Cornelius (1991).

the first group consists of households that have managed to a certain degree to maintain their standards of living in large part because of remittance income from international migrants. A second group of landless households (comprising about 36 percent of the landless), more closely resembles the subsistence sector in their tenuous ability to make ends meet. Overall, the income gap between the subsistence and landless sectors narrowed significantly in the period 1982-1991 (see Table 1A).

Particularly evident among landless households was the impact of belt-tightening on children's schooling. Children frequently missed school in order to help out in *maquila* or to seek wage work in guava. Secondary education has also been severely curtailed, especially for daughters. Because daughters make a substantial contribution to household income through homework, many mothers felt they could not justify the extra expense, much less the loss of income, entailed in sending a daughter to secondary school.

In summary, the drive toward agricultural "modernization" in Calvillo has had far-reaching implications for every segment of rural society. First, it has marginalized small-scale guava farmers and in the process reduced important income opportunities for producers and laborers alike. At the same time, deteriorating market conditions have fundamentally restructured the regional labor market by reducing total labor demand. Second, deregulation in the form of reduced state subsidies for numerous agricultural inputs and the economic crisis in general have placed the entire rural class structure in a state of flux. In the early 1980s, the breakdown of households into "small proprietor," "subsistence," and "landless" groups provided a useful approximation to rural stratification in Calvillo. While the sample is too small to conclude that a major class reconfiguration has taken place, it is evident that these same class categories no longer adequately depict the profound economic and social transformations taking place across as well as within major rural groups.

Finally, the crisis has had a strong gender-differentiated impact. Among smallholder and landless households, declining employment opportunities for men in agriculture and increased male out-migration have resulted in a greater reliance of families on women's and daughters' earnings.

4. Migration and *Maquila*: Strategies for Survival?

Although the above picture provides an accurate overview of the impact of "modernization" processes in Calvillo, two very specific activities capture the tenacity with which households responded to the crisis: male migration to the United States and female involvement in homework. Indeed, the vast majority of households, irrespective of class status, increased their participation in migration and/or *maquila* in order to counteract deteriorating living standards.

With regard to migration, in 1982 47.2 percent of households in the Calvillo survey contained one or more migrants, and 75 percent of the migrant population chose destinations in the United States. By 1991, over three-fourths of all

households contained migrants and 97 percent of these migrants headed toward the United States.

Table 2 provides a breakdown of Calvillo's main class groups and their involvement in migration in 1982 and 1991. Although the proportion of migrant households by class remained relatively constant between the two time periods, the volume of migration *within* each class jumped significantly. In 1982, only one household within the small proprietor class was involved in migration; in 1991, half of these households reported to have at least one family member engaged in migration over the preceding twelve months. Among the subsistence and landless classes, roughly half of all households from each of these two social sectors had migrants in 1982. Nearly ten years later, 90 percent of subsistence households and 74 percent of landless households contained migrants. Moreover, the data show that 72.3 percent of all households regularly engaged in international migration in the five years preceding the survey.

Like migration, households' involvement in *maquila* increased significantly between the two time periods. As Table 3 indicates, subsistence households continue to have the greatest participation in *maquila* with nearly three-fourths of all households taking in piecework in 1991. And the inclusion of one small proprietor unit among households with *maquila* provides additional evidence of the economic decline of this sector: in 1982 not a single woman from this stratum worked for wages, in *maquila* or otherwise.

Without a doubt, these two activities, more than any others, made the difference between economic survival and economic disintegration during the years of the crisis. Households receiving remittances from migrant workers in the United States stated that this income played a decisive role in cushioning the effects of losses in household income from other sources. In several households, remittance income was significant enough to allow families to continue purchasing an array of consumer durables (TVs, stereos, pick-up trucks), and to make investments in their physical living conditions. Many interviewees could also point to entire communities that had prospered because of migrant income. For the most part, the women I interviewed did not consider their earnings from *maquila* to be as important in monetary terms as remittances. Nonetheless, they were certain that homework income provided at the very least for *el gasto diario*, or for day-to-day expenses. Furthermore, unlike migration income which is only partially pooled, women directly controlled earnings from homework and their spending invariably provided for children's nutrition, clothing, and the like.

By the end of 1991, however, the "strategies" that helped many rural households in Calvillo pull through one of most difficult periods of their lives exhibited serious shortcomings. Changes in both the pattern of migration to the United States and the overall importance of *maquila* to household income account for the contradictory effects on households' economic *and* social stability.

As mentioned earlier, in the years prior to the crisis, migration to the United States drew male heads of households and older sons: in 1982, men heading households comprised 34.1 percent of the migrant pool and sons accounted for 47.7 percent of migrants. In 1991, sons accounted for 73.5 percent of all migrants. The overwhelming presence of sons in the contemporary migrant pool has had major implications for sending households. Family members reported that remittances from sons were more sporadic and less substantial than remittances from male heads of households. In fact, in 1982 over 90 percent of households with migrants received remittance income and these households on average received about \$1150 US dollars per year. In 1991, migrant households receiving remittances fell to 75 percent and the average yearly amount had dropped nearly 40 percent to \$674 US dollars. Moreover, sons remitting considerable sums of money in 1991 often had their earnings earmarked for specific personal expenditures such as a wedding or home construction. As Table 1A indicates, by 1991 migration remittances accounted for only 10 percent of total monetary income among landless households in the survey.

Families also maintained that because of poor employment and wage opportunities in Calvillo (and a booming market for immigrant labor in the United States in the 1980s), sons have little incentive to return home. As a consequence, ties to family and relatives in the home community weakened over the years; several interviewees reported that they had lost contact altogether with their children in the United States. The survey data reveal that the current group of migrants do indeed remain away for longer periods of time than their predecessors--5.2 years (1991) versus 3.1 years (1982). Rafaela, a woman with two brothers, ages 22 and 19, working in California, described her family's situation as follows:

Juan [the older brother] left four years ago. He stayed three years [in California] before coming home. He was home for about three months and then left again. He's been saving his money to build a house and to get married. Every once in a while the two of them will send us \$1000 dollars--to help out with school expenses or if there is an illness in the family--but it's not a sure thing; it doesn't happen every month.

The changes in the intensity and composition of the migrant population in turn altered the traditional role played by women's earnings in *maquila*, that is, to tide over families in the interim before remittances arrived. As remittances became a less reliable source of household income, women attempted to maximize earnings by increasing the total number of hours family members devoted to homework and, if economically feasible, to purchase or rent an industrial sewing machine, and thereby increase productivity. Households with sewing machines, or 29 percent of households with *maquila*, were also able to take advantage of one of the better-paid jobs in *maquila*: embroidered collars for women's dresses. By the beginning of the 1990s, however, women engaged in piecework complained that they were barely able to make ends meet. Because of cyclical fluctuations in demand for collars and blouses, they had received less piecework than in previous years. Nearly all the

homeworkers I interviewed calculated that once they deducted operating expenses (sewing machine rental, electricity, thread, needles, etc.), they were operating at a loss, or at best breaking even.

The data in Tables 4 and 4A illustrate the profound changes affecting women's remunerated labor and income. Overall, the percentage of women performing remunerated labor rose significantly between 1982 and 1991. Among subsistence households, women constitute almost half (47 percent) of all household members performing remunerated labor in 1991; during this same time period, landless women accounted for over 40 percent of household members engaged in money-making activities. And in both social classes, *maquila* continues to dominate women's income earning. Yet women's increased participation in paid labor is matched by lower, rather than higher, rates of return. Between 1982 and 1991, average daily earnings for the poorest peasant women fell by more than half: in 1982, women of the subsistence sector earned US \$2.36 per day; in 1991, average daily piece wages had fallen to US \$1.12. Although less dramatic, women from the landless sector also witnessed a sharp decline in piece wages: between 1982 and 1991, women's daily earnings fell by 20 percent.

Most serious, the present slump in rural *maquila doméstica* may not be short-lived. The economy-wide recession of the 1980s signaled a fundamental restructuring of the state's textile and garment industries. By the end of the decade, over 40 percent of the firms in these industries had foreclosed or merged with larger establishments (Rojas Nieto 1989). The concentration of production in the hands of larger, more technologically efficient firms meant fewer workers both in and outside the factory. Not only do rural homeworkers receive far less work than in previous years, but most of the available work consists of *deshilados* or the hand-stitching of designs on women's and children's blouses--the most labor-intensive and worst-paid task in the industry.⁶ In 1991, a considerable number, indeed the majority (53.6 percent), of *maquila* households in Calvillo engaged in the manufacture of *deshilados*. In Calvillo, then, the fact that women are working more and earning less is a consequence of several interrelated trends: declining income opportunities in *maquila*, a shift toward poorly paid assembly tasks, and depressed piece rates for home-based work as a whole.

Faced with a long-term slump in *maquila*, few alternative or viable off-farm jobs, and a sharp drop in remittance income, growing numbers of rural women have opted to follow the well-established migration trajectory of their male kin. In a number of cases, women have moved with their families or joined migrant

⁶ Highly skilled women machine embroidering designs on collars can complete one collar in 30 to 45 minutes. On average, women produce ten collars a day or 50 per week. Depending upon the degree of difficulty of the embroidered pattern and the firm distributing the material, women receive anywhere between \$4000-\$7000 pesos per collar. (In October 1991 one US dollar = \$3000 Mexican pesos.) Elaborately hand-sewn blouses (*deshilados*) on the other hand, take a single woman several hours to complete. Working six to eight hours a day, a woman can finish three a day or about 12 per week. By way of comparison, male agricultural workers in guava are paid \$20,000 pesos *per day*.

spouses in the United States. For example, of the 41 households containing migrants in 1991, six households--five from the landless sector alone--had migrated as complete family units, four of them to the United States.

The largest contingent of female migrants, however, consists of daughters in their early to mid-twenties. In 1982, women comprised under 10 percent of the migrant pool in Calvillo and without exception female migrants headed toward urban centers within Mexico. By 1992, however, daughters alone accounted for 10.3 percent of all migrants (female heads of households, 4.4 percent), and the United States was the preferred destination.⁷

5. Concluding Remarks

This paper has documented the impact of Mexico's economic crisis on rural households in Calvillo, Aguascalientes. It traced the interactions among deregulation of guava production, changes in Calvillo's rural class structure, and women's increased responsibilities for the economic and social welfare of their households. The paper then explored the important role of male migration to the United States and women's work in *maquila doméstica* in mitigating the adverse effects of the crisis. It then demonstrated that these activities, however important in the past, no longer represent viable economic strategies for household subsistence and reproduction. This is especially true for the poor peasantry, where homework and migration are most prevalent, yet households face enormous obstacles in meeting everyday survival needs.

One major conclusion is that all social sectors responded dynamically to years of economic decline and uncertainty. Nonetheless, the Calvillo study reveals that at the household level women are largely responsible for devising survival strategies to cope with the crisis. Indeed, women worked in more kinds of income-earning activities than their male counterparts, yet faced significant decreases in total household income. Without a doubt, women's increased participation in paid employment cushioned the fall in total household income over the decade. Nevertheless, decreases in remittance income--the most sizable portion of rural family budgets--were not recouped by female earnings. Certainly, women's increased burden for family well-being relates to the specific way in which the crisis has affected the gender division of labor in Calvillo, but it also relates to gender ideologies that perceive the collection and distribution of money and other resources to be the ultimate responsibility of women (Massiah 1990: 238).

The economic crisis placed new burdens on rural households and families. Most notably, the mass exodus of people from Calvillo, especially young people, has all but transformed rural life. First, the sheer volume of migration ("*Hasta los perros quieren ir al norte*," or "Even the dogs want to go north," is how one woman

⁷ The major migration trends documented in Calvillo in the 1980s--increased male migration to the United States, long-term residency in the United States and a higher incidence of female migration--have also been reported for other rural sending communities in Mexico (see Cornelius 1991).

described the situation) has had a visible impact on Calvillo's demographic structure. The increased incidence of female migration in addition to already high rates of male migration has left entire communities with few working-age children.

Second, the shift from temporary, circular migration to permanent settlement in the United States has taken its toll on smallholder agriculture. Although production on the land does not represent an important source of income for poor peasant households, subsistence cultivation continues to be a chief source of food for Calvillo's rural poor. Yet in those instances of the migration of husbands and older children, the women left behind experience great difficulty juggling domestic chores, wage work, and the numerous agricultural tasks performed by family members prior to migration. Not only are women disadvantaged by overwork, but the economic crisis has led to a drastic reduction in public and private credit, technical assistance, and other agricultural services. In some cases, remittances have enabled women to hire laborers to work the land. In most cases, however, women have found it necessary to abandon agricultural production altogether.

Third, the migration of children of both sexes has increased tensions within the family unit. For example, the prolonged absence of male migrants in conjunction with irregular and insufficient remittance income has led to an increase in *de facto* and *de jure* female-headed households. Although the percentage of women abandoned by their husbands was relatively small (under 5 percent of households in the survey), women expressed considerable anxiety about their husbands leaving for the United States. Rumors circulated about men with second wives and families in *el norte* and women blamed their husbands' and sons' drinking and gambling habits on their trips across the border.

Not infrequently, women abandoned for long periods of time take up residence with other women, particularly their mothers or married daughters. In addition, women migrating to join spouses in the United States often leave their young children behind with grandparents. Both situations have augmented women's domestic burden and severely strained already meager household budgets.

In Calvillo, then, profound structural changes including the deregulation of guava production, dwindling remittances, and the virtual collapse of *maquila* work greatly increased rural out-migration. Clearly, international migration has resulted in a number of positive changes for the individuals involved: it offers the chance of an improved standard of living and for women in particular the opportunity to break out of traditionally restrictive roles in the countryside. From the standpoint of the rural family and community, however, the most recent wave of migration is problematic. Most serious is the fact that international labor migration, once a primary means to "ensure the long-term survivability of the household" (Grindle 1991: 140), no longer forms part of a *family* strategy for survival or upward mobility, but rather represents an *individual* response to households' downward economic spiral.

Overall, these findings suggest that policy interventions aimed at "adjustment with a human face" need to include both a class and a gender dimension. Alternative social adjustment strategies based on social equity and distribution--whether these include income generating schemes or credit subsidies for small farmers--must recognize the fundamental changes in rural employment and income brought about by the crisis of the 1980s. At the same time, they must address the critical role women play in household income generation and distribution and ensure that women are the direct beneficiaries of these strategies.

Table 1
Average (Gross) Weekly Income by Class
(N = 53 Households)
1982

Class	Average Weekly Earnings (US \$)	% of Total Monetary Income Derived From:		
		Migration Remittances	Maquila	All Women's Remun. Labor
Small Proprietor	415.4	1.9	0.0	1.5
Subsistence	43.9	16.7	20.5	22.7
Landless	60.2	24.3	18.7	19.8

Table 1A
Average (Gross) Weekly Income by Class
(N = 47 Households)
1991

Class	Average Weekly Earnings (US \$)	% of Total Monetary Income Derived From:		
		Migration Remittances	Maquila	All Women's Remun. Labor
Small Proprietor*	---	---	---	---
Subsistence	38.2	28.5	13.7	24.0
Landless	48.1	10.3	20.6	27.6

*Insufficient data.

Source: Author's household surveys of Calvillo, Aguascalientes, 1982 & 1991.

Table 2
Households With Migrants by Class & Year

Class	Households	Percentage of Households with Migrants	
		1982	1991
Small Proprietor	6	16.6	50.0
Subsistence	20	50.0	90.0
Landless	27	48.1	74.1
Total	53	47.2	77.3

Table 3
Households Engaged in Maquila Domestica
By Class and Year

Class	1982		1991	
	Households	% Maquila	Households	%Maquila
Small Proprietor	6	0.0	6	16.6
Subsistence	20	60.0	19	73.7
Landless	27	55.5	22	63.6
Total	53	51.0	47*	61.7

* Total excludes six households (one subsistence and five landless) in which the entire family unit migrated in 1991.

Source: Author's household surveys of Calvillo, Aguascalientes, 1982 & 1991.

Table 4
Women's Participation in and Returns
to Maquila Domestica by Class
(N = 47 Households)

1982				
Class	All Household Members Perform. Remunerated Labor	% Woman	% Women Maquila	Av. Daily Earnings Maquila (US \$)
Small Proprietor	11	9.1	0.0	N/A
Subsistence	71	40.8	39.4	\$2.36
Landless	67	37.3	32.8	\$3.08
Total	149	36.9	33.5	\$2.76

Table 4A
Women's Participation in and Returns
to Maquila Domestica by Class
(N = 47 Households)

1991				
Class	All Household Members Perform. Remunerated Labor	% Woman	% Women Maquila	Av. Daily Earnings Maquila (US \$)
Small Proprietor	10	50.0	10.0	\$1.05
Subsistence	66	47.0	42.4	\$1.12
Landless	66	42.4	30.0	\$2.47
Total	142	45.1	34.5	\$1.77

Source: Author's household surveys of Calvillo, Aguascalientes, 1982 & 1991.

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WOMEN'S SITUATION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN : RECENT TRENDS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC POLICY

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During the 1980s, Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries suffered a series of severe economic crises. Retrenchment and adjustment virtually wiped out improvements in living conditions that the region had achieved in the previous twenty years. Inequality worsened in most countries and the percentage of the population living in poverty rose sharply: from 26.5 percent in 1980 to 31 percent in 1989, according to World Bank (1993) regional estimates, or from 41 percent in 1980 to 44 percent in 1989, according to ECLAC (1991) figures. In response to this economic upheaval, women joined the work force in unprecedented numbers. Their contributions to overall growth and the survival of households, especially poor ones, have been sizable.

These economic contributions of women are in part grounded on their long-term educational and health gains. Over the last two decades there has been a uniform rise in life expectancy at birth; consistent declines in total fertility rates (from an average of 5 to 3.4 children per woman); and improved rates in primary education, where girls have attained parity with boys in enrollment in most countries (Buvinic and Lycette 1994). Yet there is significant variation in women's situation across countries and within countries among subregion-wide economic and social reforms. These reforms, to be effective, must build on women's economic contributions while taking into account their poverty and the effects of women's poverty on family welfare. The reasons for this statement are grounded on the empirical evidence on women's situation that is graphically summarized below.

The Feminization of Low-Wage Work

Figure 1 portrays changes in economic activity rates by sex for thirty countries. It shows that during the 1980s economic activity rates for women increased in more countries than did economic activity rates for men. The converse is also true, and fewer countries experienced decreases in women's economic activity rates when compared to men's (Standing 1989). Much of this growth is attributed to the rising participation of women in the urban economy. But there is substantial underestimation of women's work in rural areas that may be masking increases in their work participation. For instance, careful reinterviewing of a sample of rural women that had been classified as "economically inactive" in the Costa Rican census revealed that 41 percent had worked in agriculture all year round (White et al. 1986). In Ecuador, women's participation rates in a rural employment survey were three times higher when compared to the figures in the census (Cuví 1992).

Figure 2 shows that in 1990 activity rates diminish only slightly for women in the 25 to 45 year age group, when most women have childbearing and childrearing responsibilities. The notion that mothers withdraw from the labor force once they

start having children is increasingly inappropriate to explain women's behavior (CELADE 1992).

But the feminization of work is the feminization of low-income, low-paid work. Figure 3 reveals changes over a decade in the proportion of women in self-employment, employment that is characterized by low technological inputs, low and oftentimes erratic wages, and no social security or other employment benefits. As the figure indicates, with the exception of Guatemala where the proportion of women among the self-employed shrank somewhat (from 29 percent to 25 percent), in all other countries the presence of women in this low-paid sector of the economy grew over time (Standing 1989; Escobar de Pabón 1993).

Two trends help to explain women's growing participation in low-paid, unprotected, and often uncounted work. One is that outward-oriented export promotion policies that have been in vogue since the mid-eighties in a majority of countries in the region--as part or independent of structural adjustment programs--have increased the demand for women workers willing to work for low wages. The other is that the economic crisis of the early 1980s motivated low-income women to seek paid work in order to compensate for real declines in household income. These are often known as "added worker" effects. A common problem that complicates establishing the occurrence of these effects by examining labor force participation trends is the separation of cyclical effects related to economic downturns from the secular rise in female labor force rates that may confound the effects of or prevent the rising trend from reverting back to its prerecession stage at the end of the cycle. Data for Chile during the 1974-75 economic crisis are perhaps the most clear in illustrating the "added worker" effect of the recession for low-income women without a confounding rising secular female participation trend. Figure 4 indicates a slight long-term decrease in female overall participation rates, combined with a sharp rise in the participation of poor women in the peak crisis year. This figure suggests two other important points: first, the problem in using aggregate statistics that can mask the existence of trends in opposite directions; and second, the fact that gender is not a homogeneous category--the behavior of poor women can be opposite to the behavior of better-off women, and public policy has to acknowledge these differences.

The Feminization of Poverty

The feminization of work goes hand-in-hand with the feminization of poverty. Women work because they and their families are poor, but the low wages they obtain keep them and their families in poverty. Preliminary evidence suggests that prior to and during the 1980s both the absolute number and the proportion of women among the poor has grown. Direct evidence that would emerge from documenting changes in the ratio of poor women to poor men does not exist. Indirect evidence is obtained from documenting changes in the ratio of woman-headed households among the poor. Figure 5 shows trends in female headship in selected countries; with the exception of Honduras, the percentage of households

headed by women has risen in the five other countries represented in the figure. Figure 6 corroborates the rising trend and shows the poverty condition of these households: they are overrepresented among the poor in the four countries cited in the figure.

We reviewed 32 recent studies on the relationship between female headship and poverty (Buvinic and Gupta 1994). Only five of the 32 studies did not find a relationship between female headship and poverty (as measured by a variety of indicators, including per-capita consumption expenditure and per-capita income poverty measures). All others did. Three sets of factors explain why woman-headed households tend to be poorer than other households.

First, despite being smaller in size, woman-headed households often carry a high dependency burden; that is, they have a higher ratio of children and older people to working-age adults (and no support payments from absent fathers). Second, in these households the main earners are women, who, on average, earn 60 to 75 percent of what men earn (Psacharopoulos and Tzannatos 1992). And last, women who head households can experience added economic constraints because of their unique circumstance of being a female in charge of a household. Especially in Spanish-speaking Latin America, widowhood may be the only female headship condition that does not carry with it a heavy social stigma. The following mechanisms can contribute to the unique poverty of women heads: (a) women heads may experience greater time and mobility constraints than other women and most men heads, and therefore "prefer" to pay more for services that save time or to work fewer hours, and earn less, because of constraints on their mobility; (b) women heads may experience discrimination in access to jobs and resources, such as credit, not because of their sex but because they are female heads, or may themselves make inappropriate choices because of expectations of discrimination in access; and (c) women heads may share a history of premature unpartnered parenthood that helps transmit poverty from one generation to the next.

Documenting this last point, Figure 7 shows the combined effects of adolescent motherhood and poverty in the transmission of disadvantage into the next generation in Santiago, Chile. In this case, the transmission of poverty was reflected in child nutritional status (Buvinic and Valenzuela, forthcoming). Figures 8 and 9 depict the point mentioned earlier of the importance of the earnings of the female head in explaining their greater poverty in Brazil. In this case, less remunerative jobs open to women in the labor market (rather than differences in work experience or sex disparities in education) explained most of the earnings differentials between male and female heads. Fifty-three percent of female heads held low-paying jobs in the informal sector while only 13 percent of male heads did so (Merrick and Schmink 1983).

Consequences of Women's Poverty

The rising numbers of poor families headed by women and the feminization of work at home and in the market go hand in hand. This can set in motion a

vicious cycle of poverty and deprivation in which poverty causes increased female work that, in turn, exacerbates women's and children's deprivation and poverty, unless women find work that pays adequately. Until fairly recently, the prevailing assumption was that any positive income effect of poor women's employment on children's health and well-being would be offset by negative effects of reduced child-care time by working mothers or by the substitution of older siblings in child care. Recent studies, however, do not support this assumption. They instead signal the importance of the productivity of women's work and the level of women's wages in insuring child nutrition and suggest that the income poor women earn can yield higher social benefits than the income men earn.

In Brazil, for instance, income in the hands of the mother has an effect on child health that is 20 percent greater than income that is controlled by the father (Thomas 1990). In Guatemala, it takes fifteen times more expenditures in child nutrition when income is earned by the father than when it is earned by the mother (Engle 1993); similar results have been reported for Chile and Jamaica (Buvinic et al. 1992; Louat et al. 1992). The preference that women have to invest in child well-being appears in poorer families rather than in better-off ones either because investments in children yield greater returns at lower levels of income or because there are fewer competing alternative investments than in higher income households (Kennedy 1992).

But there are also apparently contradictory reports of negative effects of female headship on child well-being. For instance, in rural Ecuador the disadvantaged economic position of female-headed households compromises the school attendance of children, who partly substitute for their mothers in work (DeGraff and Bilsborrow in press). A likely hypothesis to reconcile positive and negative findings is that women need a minimum level of earnings or income to act on their preferences to invest scarce resources on child well-being; below a minimum threshold, the economic deprivation suffered by poor women who work in the market is readily (or more easily) transmitted to the next generation.

Policy Implications

The implications for policy of the evidence presented here appear straightforward enough: the need to implement social and economic reform packages in the region that reinforce the *virtuous* cycle between women's and children's well-being, which can occur in poor families when women have increased income and/or control of income, and avoid those that, by increasing women's time burdens or reducing their earning potential, can instead trigger a *vicious* cycle of deprivation between mothers and children. Antipoverty policies need to raise women's productivity in home production and productivity and earnings in market production.

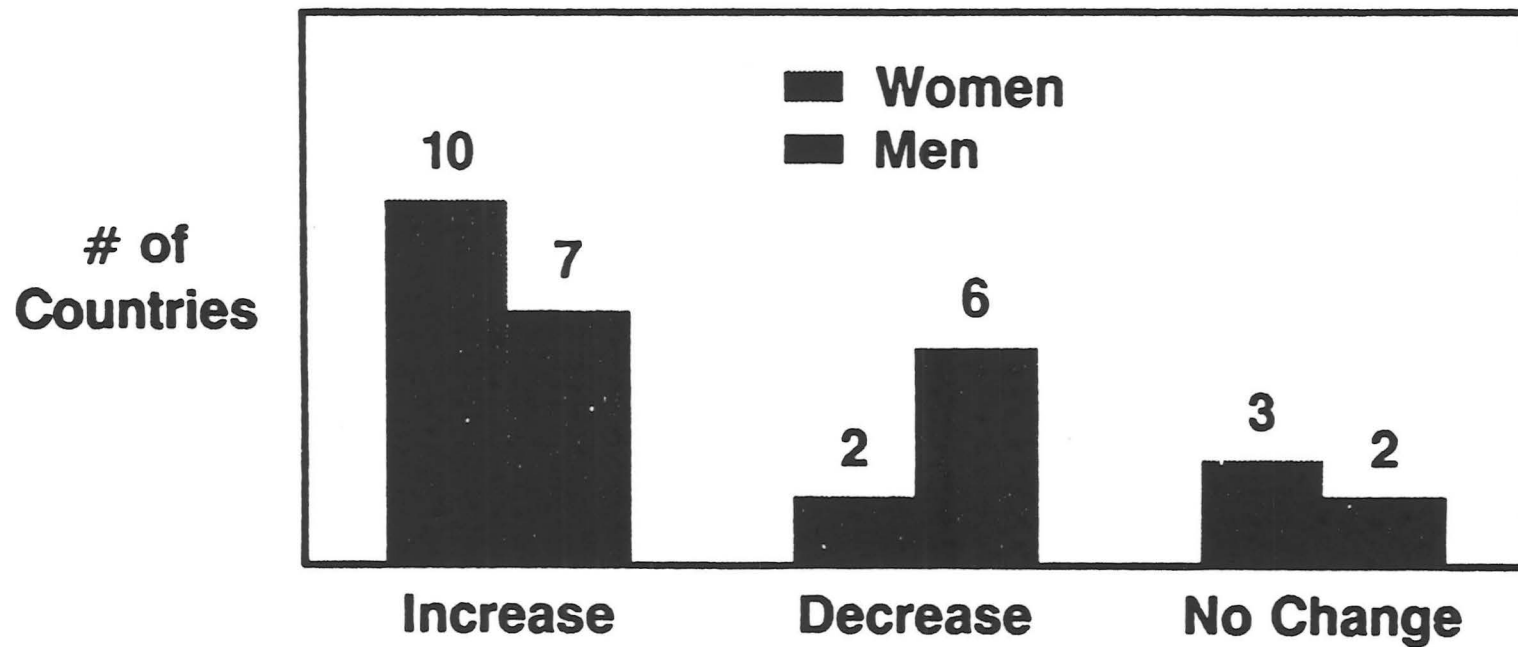
These measures are not easy to adopt and implement. This is not because of lack of knowledge about women and their economic behavior, but because of the perceived high political costs of targeting income-enhancing interventions to

women. (A still widely prevalent myth is that women's economic empowerment is a main cause of family--and therefore social--disintegration.) This is despite the fact that administrative costs may be lower than similar policies targeting men and that social benefits of investing in women tend to be greater than the social benefits of investing a similar amount of resources in men, because of women's preference to devote resources to the well-being of children (World Bank 1993). Gender scholars and activists need to debunk myths and inform policy makers of the benefits of investing in women for both economic growth and the prospect of attaining less poor and more equal Latin American and Caribbean societies. To be successful, however, they need to combine rational arguments with political pressure and activism at the national, regional, and international levels.

Figure 1

Feminization of Work in the 1980s in LAC

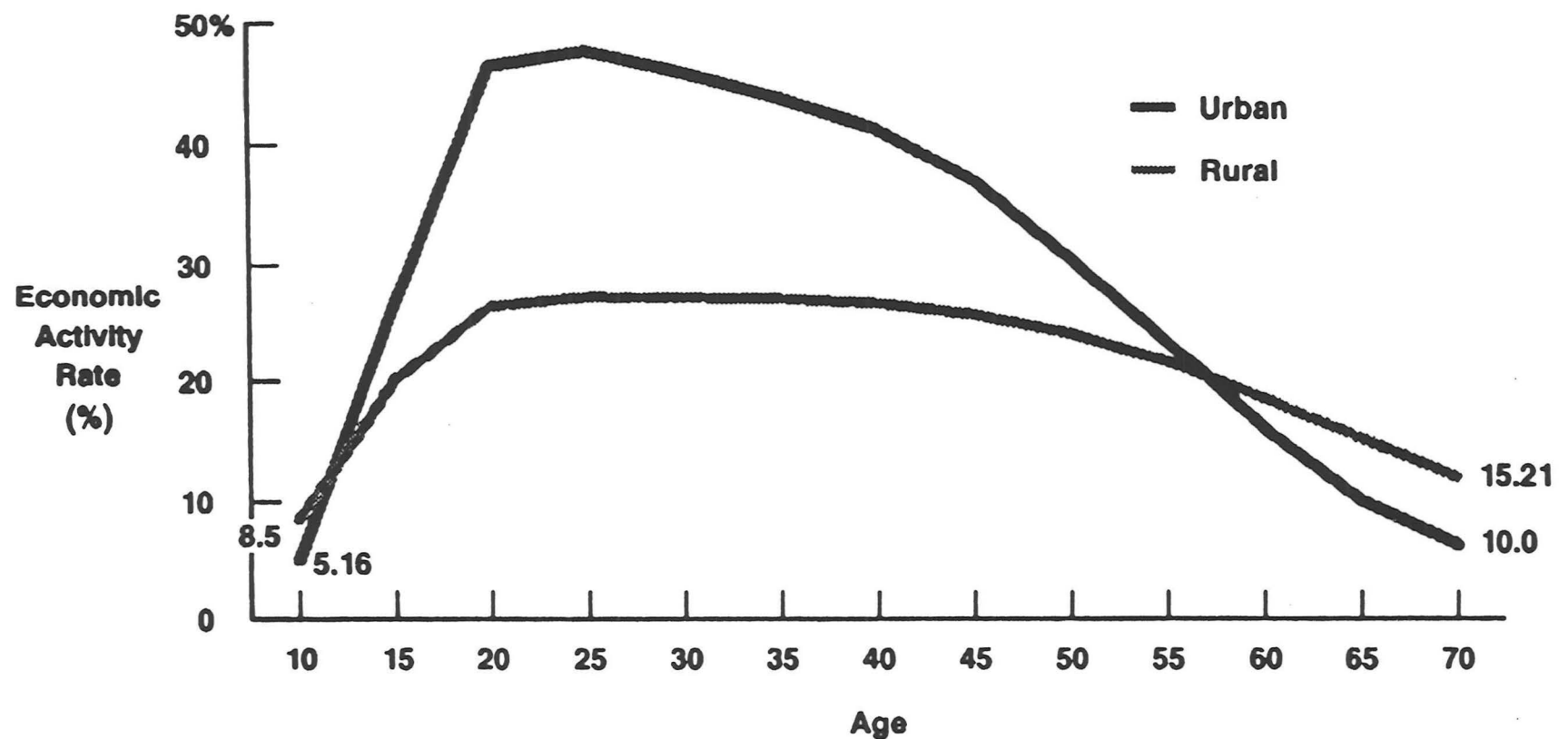
(Activity Rates)



Source: Standing, 1989.

Figure 2

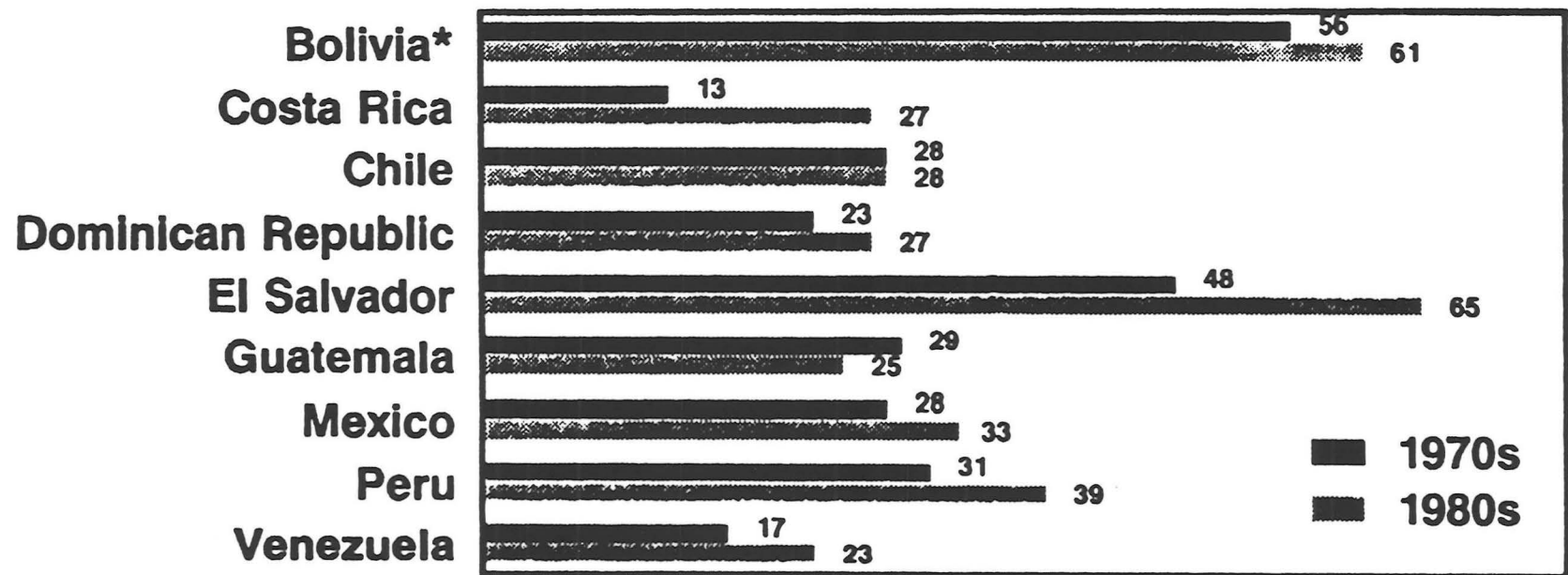
Women's Economic Activity Rate By Age for 1990



Source: CELADE, 1992.

Figure 3

Share of Women in Self-Employment in LAC (%)



* Comparing 1985 to 1991 for urban areas only.

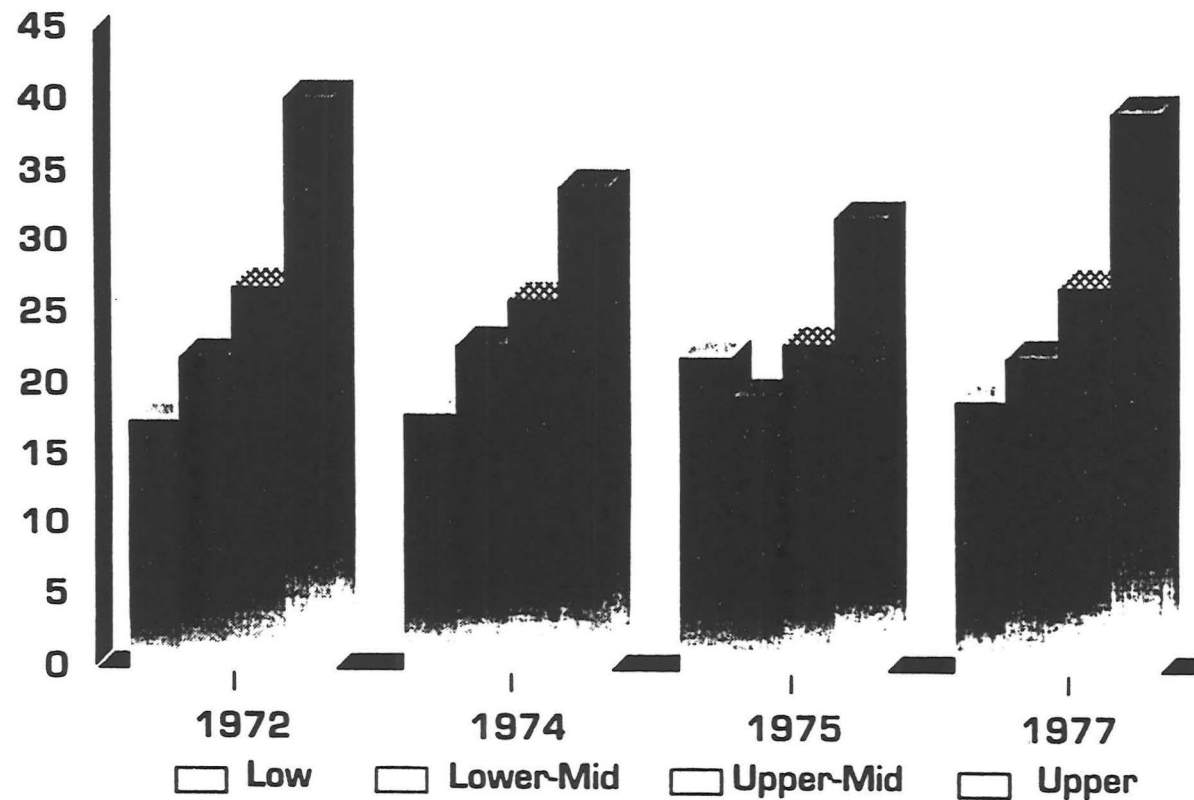
Sources: Standing, 1989.

Escobar de Pabon, 1993.

% of
Women

Figure 4

Rates of Female Labor Force Participation in Chile by Family Income Level for Selected Years (Comparing Peak Recession (1975) with Pre and Post-Recession Years)



Source: Osvaldo Rosales Villavicencio, 1979

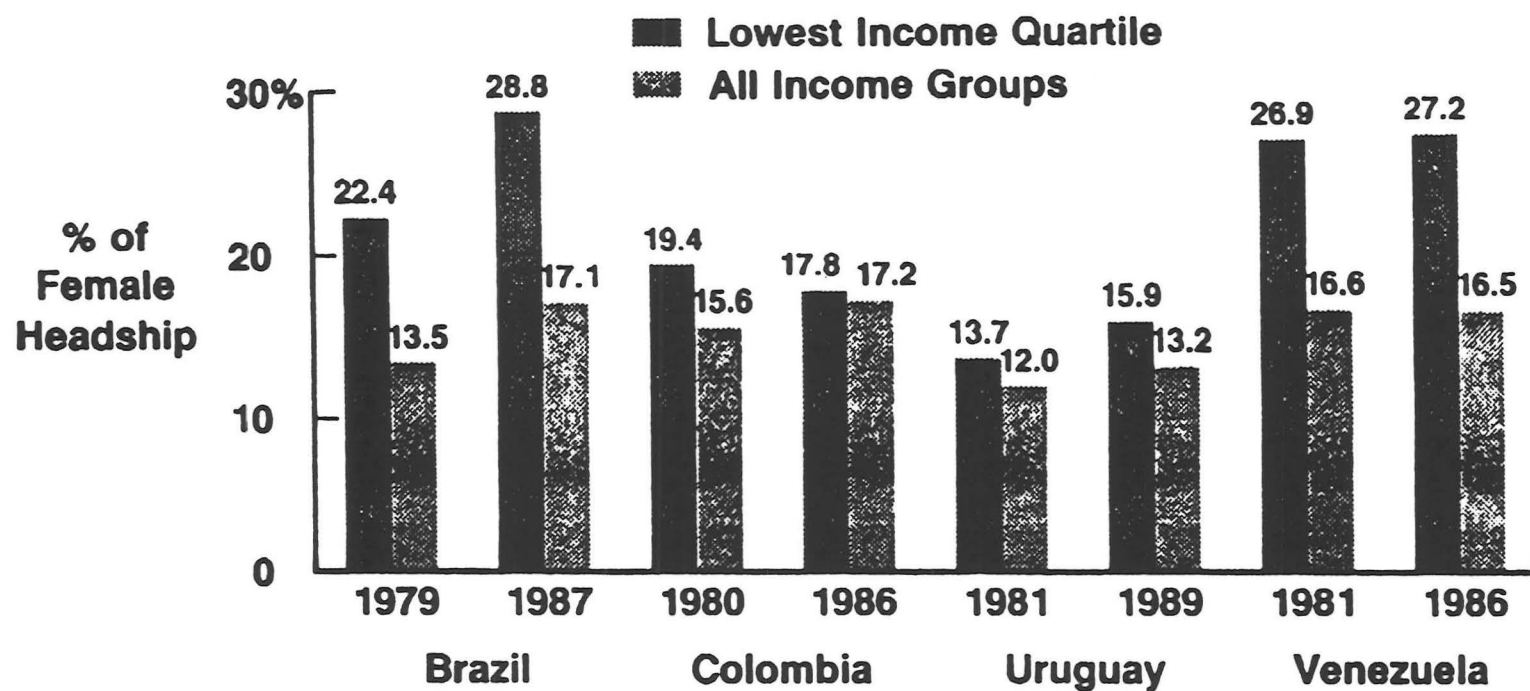
Figure 5

Trends in Female Headship in Selected Latin American Countries (in Percentages)

<u>Country</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Brazil	1960	10.7
	1970	13.0
	1986	18.4
Costa Rica	1982	17.0
	1984	17.5
Dominican Republic	1980	21.7
	1987	26.1
Honduras	1974	22.0
	1986-1987	20.0
Mexico	1977	13.6
	1980	14.0
Peru	1970	14.1
	1981	22.0

Figure 6

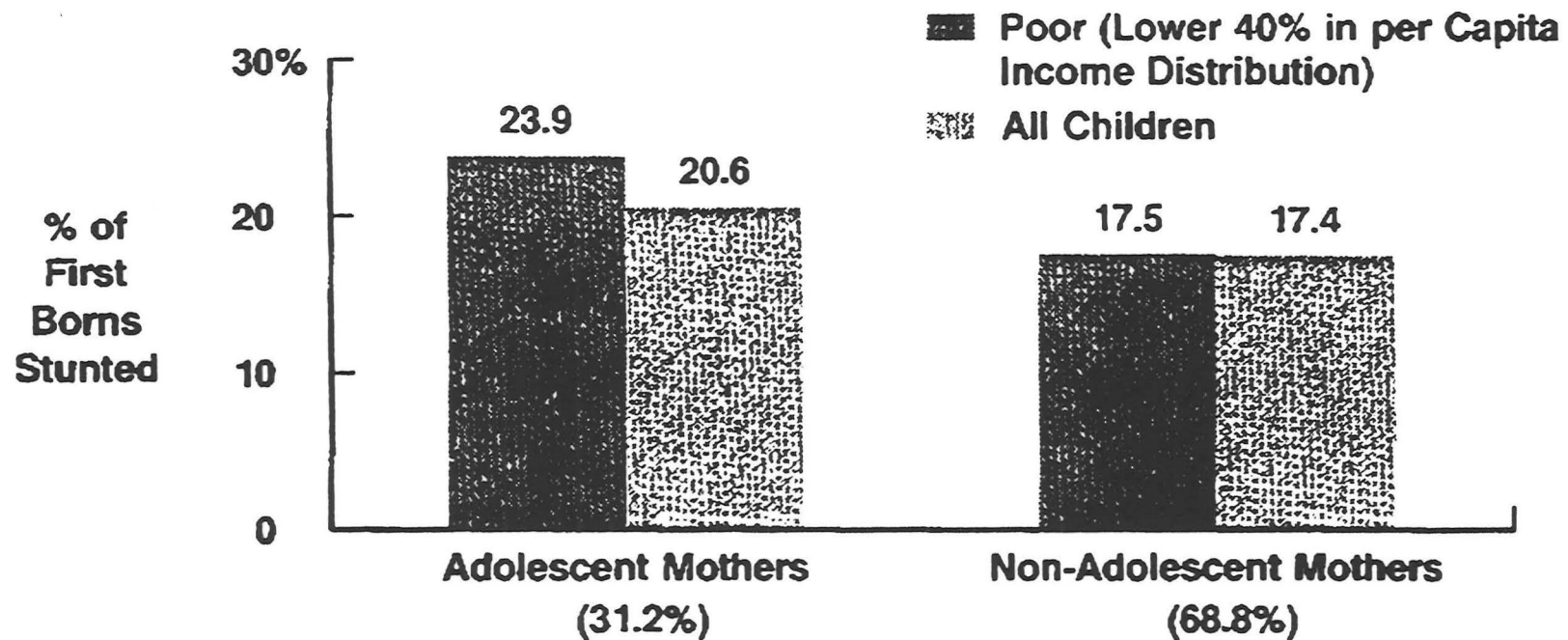
Trends in Unpartnered Female Headship, Ages 15-49 by Income Groups in Four Urban Areas



Source: ECLAC, 1993.

Figure 7

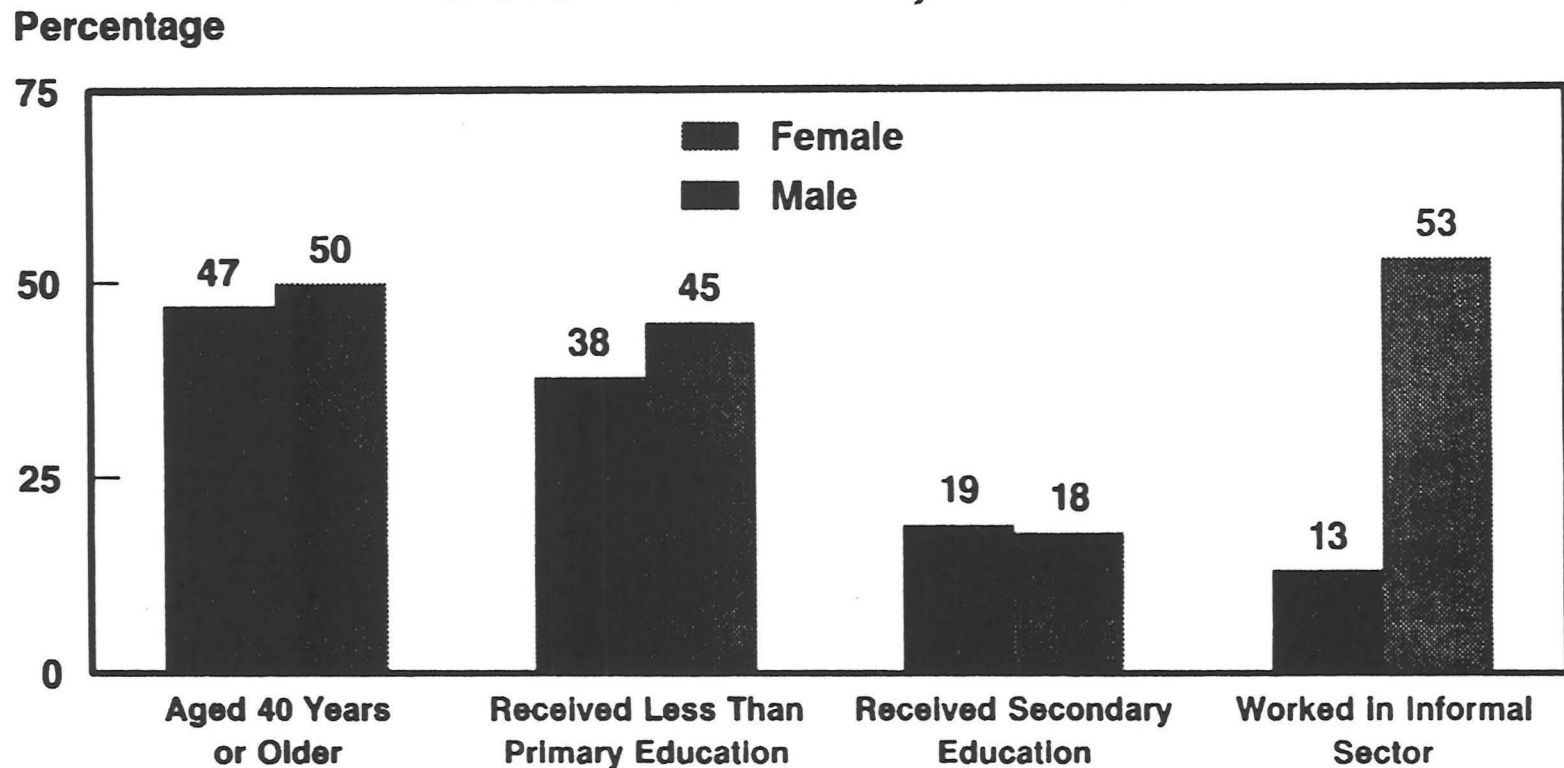
Characteristics Associated with Child Nutritional Status in Santiago, Chile



Note: Children's Ages Vary Between 5 and 9 Years. Sample of 504 Children, Representative of Population of 149,337 Women/Children
Source: Buvinic and Valenzuela, Forthcoming.

Figure 8

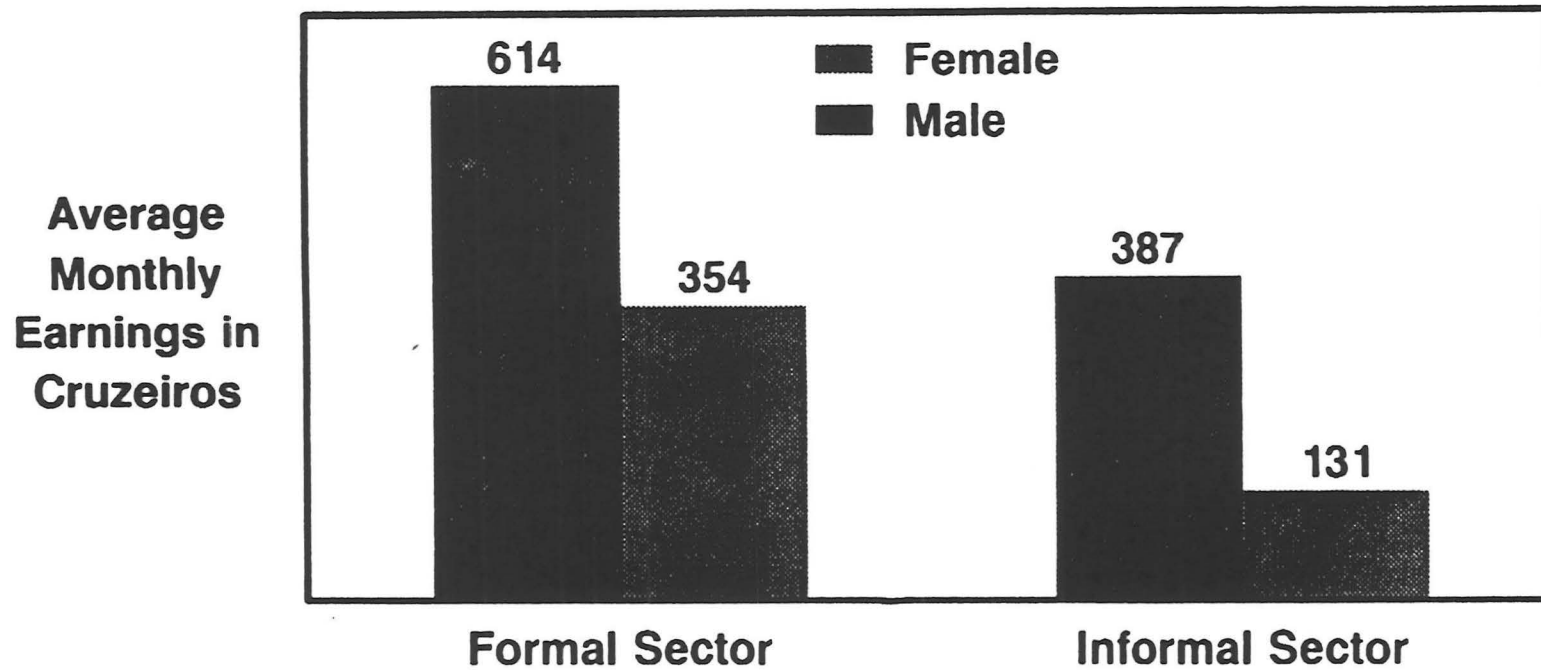
Percentage of Male and Female Headed Households According to Age, Education and Employment, Belo Horizonte, Brazil



Source: Merrick and Schmink, 1983.

Figure 9

Average Monthly Earnings in Cruzeiros of Male and Female Heads of Households by Employment Sector, Belo Horizonte, Brazil



Source: Merrick and Schmink, 1983.

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