

CHILE

Less poverty, more inequality



Government policies for gender equity are proceeding slowly, and women are still poorly represented in the labour market and in public and decision-making positions. At the same time, inequality in income distribution generates social segmentation and frustration even though poverty has decreased.

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Slow progress in gender equity

The changes taking place in Chilean society at the start of the 21st century have created both opportunities and obstacles for women's development and gender equity.²

Civil society organizations (CSOs) played an active role in the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, where they raised subjects that were not on the official agendas and, through pressure and lobbying, were able to influence the resolutions adopted. The importance of this contribution was recognized in the Beijing Platform for Action that gave civil society the mandate to become actively involved in its implementation and monitoring, even though it is not binding.

Some progress has been made towards fulfilling the gender commitments through the design and implementation of specific policies, but there still are many agreements to be honoured and plans to be incorporated. Follow-up and evaluation mechanisms are needed to enable citizens to demand that government authorities account for their actions.³

The concept of equal opportunities has filtered into some strata of society, but institutional progress is slow, and there is still a wide gap between it and the changes resulting from new social practices. Gender equity has hardly been assimilated into the state culture; it is still weak in programmes and institutions and resources are not forthcoming. There are different obstacles to putting legal dispositions into practice, to extending the coverage and intensifying the social programmes that are already in operation; and to incorporating the gender dimen-

sion into policies and the management of government bodies. Stereotyped patterns of behaviour and social images about the role of women still persist; and they condition the political will of those who formulate and implement laws and public policies.⁴

Barriers to economic autonomy

The last census (2002) showed that only 35.6% of the economically active female population were in the labour force.⁵ The vast majority of women are excluded, and this not only has an economic impact on households but also makes women dependent and subordinate in domestic life, particularly in the realm of power relationships.

According to the 2003 National Socio-economic Survey (CASEN), the mean income of urban women was only 77.2% that of men.⁶ The same survey (2000 edition) showed that the more years of schooling that a person has, the wider the pay gap between men and women in the same job. A woman with three years of study or less earns 18.6% less than a man in the same situation, but a woman with 13 or more years of training makes 35.7% less than a man at the same level.⁷ Besides this, the provision of maternity benefits laid down in the Labour Code only operates for a limited sector of workers.

Sexual and reproductive health

Unlike other countries in the region, sexual and reproductive rights in Chile are not recognized legally or in the constitution.⁸ As a consequence, access to information, education and sexual and reproductive health services is very limited. Different types of contraception - emergency methods in particular - are difficult to obtain. The same applies to male or female sterilization in the public health system.⁹

After the Beijing Conference there was some progress in legislation and a law was passed that

guarantees young pregnant women or young mothers the right to remain in school. This was crucial since pregnancy and maternity are the main reasons why adolescent girls drop out of education.¹⁰

Women in decision-making

The number of women in high positions in the executive and legislative branches of government, in regional and local government and in political parties has been increasing steadily. In 1990 there were 283 women in such positions in the whole country; fifteen years later this figure has more than doubled to 620. This is still not enough considering that the total number of executive posts in these positions in 2005 was 3,116. In other words only 19.9% of government positions are occupied by women.¹¹ They are also unequally represented in terms of the kind and the quality of positions that they do occupy. There are more women in less powerful positions, which can be seen from the high proportion of women in local councils, in regional government, and in under-secretary roles in the executive branch, in contrast to the smaller proportion among governors, mayors and ministers.

The increase in women's participation in politics is greater in positions they have been appointed to in the executive branch than in elective positions. The degree of women's participation in the executive branch varies: in 2005, 17% of ministerial cabinet posts and 27% under-secretary posts are held by women; and in Parliament they make up 5% of the Senate and 13% of the House of Representatives. In local government women account for 12% of mayors and 21% of councillors.¹²

1 The Centre of Studies for Women's Development (CEDEM) is part of the Women's Initiative Group and the Latin American Red Puentes in Entrepreneurial Social Responsibility.

2 Caro, Pamela and Alejandra Valdés. *Control ciudadano en educación y género. Monitoreo de acuerdos internacionales*. Santiago de Chile: CEDEM, 2000.

3 Valdés, Teresa, Ana María Muñoz and Alina Donoso. *1995-2003: ¿Han avanzado las mujeres? Índice de compromiso cumplido latinoamericano*. Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences/Chile, United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2005, p. 8.

4 La Morada Corporation (Coordination). *Informe sombra CEDAW 2003*. Santiago de Chile, 2003, p. 13.

5 Caro, Pamela, Catalina de la Cruz et al. *Responsabilidad social empresarial y género: Problemáticas que enfrentan las mujeres en el campo laboral*. Red Puentes, 2004, p. 3

6 Valdés, Teresa, *op cit*, p. 32.

7 Caro, Pamela (2004), *op cit*.

8 There is a bill about sexual and reproductive rights, but it has been held up in parliamentary procedures.

9 La Morada Corporation, *op cit*, p. 119.

10 Maturana, Camila. *El monitoreo como práctica de control ciudadano. Monitoreo del programa de acción de la Conferencia Internacional sobre Población y Desarrollo, Cairo, 1994*. Chile: Foro-Red of Health and Sexual and Reproductive Rights, 2004.

11 Hardy, Clarisa. "Mujeres y poder". *El mostrador*, 8 March 2005. Based on data from ongoing research at the Chile 21 Foundation about labour participation and women's policy in Chile.

12 *Ibid*.



Challenges

Progress towards parity between the number of men and women in power will make for a progressive redistribution of social and political power and will oblige institutions to confront the ethical and political dimensions of democracy as a system of relations and of representation.

If women are to be fully incorporated into productive work, equal opportunities will have to be created, but this will require more child-care infrastructure and greater task sharing in the home. In addition, the country should move towards implementing a policy of equal pay.

The Beijing Platform for Action is still a goal to aim for, but it is no less important to ratify the Optional Protocol of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.¹³

Two Chiles in one

Chile has become a paradigm case among Latin American countries and emerging economies due to its excellent macro-economic indicators: it has low inflation, it is a low-risk country, in the last 15 years the gross domestic product (GDP) grew at an average annual rate of around 5.5%, the tax system works, it is at the head of international rankings for economic freedom, and its institutional and political system is favourable to foreign investment.

But behind this solid facade the economy has a very different face. Today the country is fragmented and there are huge inequalities in the distribution of power and opportunity, and therefore of income as well. In spite of the modernization that has been taking place, people have become distrustful and discontent.

In Chile there are no serious problems of malnutrition nor are there diseases like malaria or tuberculosis; almost everybody has access to basic services, and less than 2% of the population live on less than one dollar per day.

Less poverty

An assessment of poverty by international standards indicates that Chile has made good progress. In 1990, 38.6% of Chileans were living below the poverty line¹⁴ but in 2003 the figure was only 18.8%, or roughly 3 million people. In the same period the rate of extreme

poverty fell from 12.9% to 4.7%. Although the situation has improved, these percentages mean that there are still more than 720,000 men and women living in a situation of extreme poverty.¹⁵

One big government initiative to combat extreme poverty is the Chile Solidario plan, which provides aid for the 225,000 poorest families in the country. The aim is to provide everyone with basic capabilities, guarantee social, economic and cultural rights, set up an integrated loans system, combine assistance and promotion, and intervene more to help families and individuals.

The health system has just undergone reforms aimed at ensuring quality, access and financial protection in dealing with the 56 illnesses that are related to the highest mortality rates in the country. In housing there is the Chile Barrio programme, whose objective is to do away with slum dwellings throughout the country.

A hidden malaise

Nevertheless the country suffers from another chronic illness, which a large sector of the political establishment has always hidden from the public. In the last few months it has come to the fore due to the pressure generated by several international reports. This illness is inequality. It dates back to over two centuries ago, when the country's assets were divided in an inequitable way when its upper classes gained control of the bulk of the wealth of the country, and influenced political decisions and the way institutions were created. Today the results are plain to see: the main economic groups control around 80% of production in the country.¹⁶

In Chile there has always been a pattern of cultural inequality that both tacitly and explicitly classifies people into Class A and Class B. Access to social services and to democratic rights is entirely separate and totally different for the two classes.

The unequal distribution of power and the way that institutions work perpetuate this division. One result of this is that income is distributed very unequally. According to the UNDP *Human Development Report 2004*, when it comes to income distribution Chile is among the worst ten countries for which data is available. The richest 10% of the people possess 41.2% of total income, while the poorest 10% only receive 1.2%. This gap is 35 times wider today than it was in 1990.

Besides this, per capita income in a household in the poorest 10% of the population is the equivalent of USD 25 per month, while in a household in the richest decile the monthly income per person is USD 1,282. In 60% of households monthly income per capita is below USD 160, which amounts to USD 5.3 a day, which is rather low for a country whose GDP in 2004 (adjusted by purchasing power parity) was USD 11,000 per person.

Social fragmentation

These extreme levels of inequality mean that the poor feel even poorer, creating problems of anomie, distrust and a lack of social cohesion. One of the symptoms of this is a rise in delinquency rates: in 2003 and 2004, one in three Chileans was the victim of a crime.¹⁷

The World Bank has said that,¹⁸ besides being negative in itself, a high level of inequality makes it more difficult to reduce poverty and slows down a country's economic growth. It is this factor and not ethical considerations or questions of social justice that have only recently led Chile to start tackling the problem.

Different educational, health and labour market systems which are completely sealed off from each other and that respond to each individual's purchasing power are another dimension of inequality. Most public policies are not having a real impact on poor people because they come up against this cultural and institutional barrier. This is why there are two countries in one. This situation will not change until the root causes of inequality are addressed in a real way, beyond any promises made during electoral campaigns. ■

13 Chile ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1989, but it still has not ratified the Optional Protocol, the instrument that sets up mechanisms to make the rights laid down in the Convention legally binding.

14 In Chile the poverty line is set at USD 72.8 per month in urban areas and USD 49.1 in rural areas. The indigence (extreme poverty) line is USD 36.4 and USD 28.1 per month respectively.

15 Ministry of Planning and Cooperation, CASEN 2003 Series, Vol. 1: "Pobreza, Distribución del Ingreso e Impacto Distributivo del Gasto Social".

16 Terram Foundation, 29 August 2004, www.terram.cl

17 Government of Chile. "Encuesta Nacional Urbana de Seguridad Ciudadana", April 2004, www.interior.gov.cl

18 World Bank. *Desigualdad en América Latina y el Caribe: ¿Ruptura con la Historia?*, 2003.