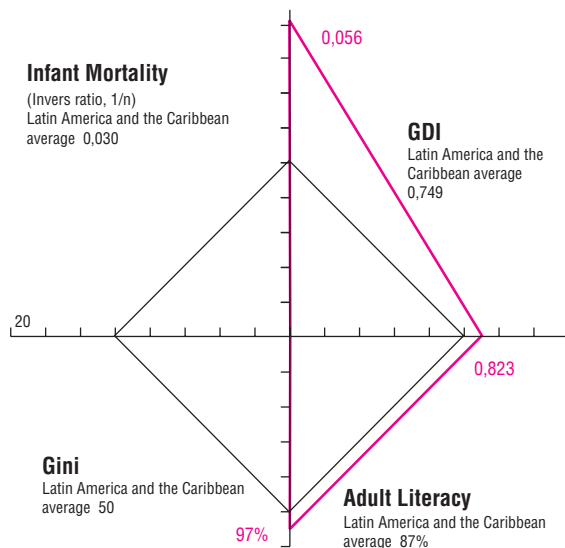


• LILÍAN CELIBERTI

## LACK OF POLITICAL WILL



*The Equity Diamond: National values in terracotta compared to regional ones in blue.*  
 Source: **Infant mortality:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*; **Adult literacy:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*; **GDI** (Gender Development Index): UNDP, *Human Development Report 1998*; **GINI:** World Bank, *World Development indicators 1998*. (The regional average for this indicator was calculated by *Social Watch*).

*The Beijing Conference gathered thousands of women from all over the world, marking a milestone regarding social participation in a United Nations Conference. In Uruguay, as in other countries, this participation has been broadened in these five years to other civil actors. New instruments have been created giving voice to different groups within specific sectors and women's NGOs. This has generated strategies and initiatives ranging from monitoring fulfilment of agreements to interaction with government bodies*

*and the formulation of proposals. Nonetheless, the government has not complied with commitments made in Beijing.*

In Uruguay, women formed the National Commission for Monitoring the Beijing Agreements (NCM) to monitor and report on government initiatives and actions aimed at achieving equality between men and women. Despite the arduous work of the NCM<sup>1</sup> and the demands and proposals made by civil society to the state, **the overall result of the Action Platform since approval five years ago is discouraging.**

Studies by the Commission show that:

- There is no political will to create a state policy to overcome inequality and gender discrimination.
- There is practically no gender perspective in the government's development plans and/or public policies.
- The few public initiatives designed to guarantee women the full exercise of citizenship lack adequate status, resources and influence at decision-making levels.

These three points reflect more profound obstacles to democracy in Uruguay: *2The incapacity to integrate into representative democracy half the citizens of the country is a clear contradiction of democracy. The presence of women in political decision-making instances should be proportional to their actual weight in the population. The small number of women in representative positions is an indicator of the exclusive nature of the political system, of its «democratic deficit.»* (Women's Agenda 1999 NCM).

In the November 1999 elections, the percentage of women representatives in parliament increased from 7% to 13%. There are no women in the new president's ministerial cabinet.

The Women's Action Platform is not central to the government's work. Where action is taken, it is usually linked directly to the

<sup>1</sup> NCM stands for Beijing Follow-up national Commission

presence of women in executive or leading posts. Such actions may therefore be discontinued when those women leave their posts. ***The existence of programmes and projects in the various government departments, while contributing to highlighting the importance of the issue, does not constitute a state policy, nor is it regulated by a programme for equality.***

The state educational system has for several decades achieved extensive coverage and sustained growth in the average level of education of the whole population and of women in particular. The illiteracy rate is 2.6% for women and 3.6% for men. Women have a higher percentage in the secondary and tertiary levels. But higher educational levels do not give women an advantage in the job market and they need more education than men to compete and achieve similar income levels.

The rate of women who were economically active was 37% in 1981 and in 1996, it reached 47% (where it has remained constant until now); but even though this represents a step forward, it must be taken into account that the men's rate has remained unchanged at 73%. Women are more affected than men by under-employment and unemployment and the sum of women's salaries is 30% lower than men's. ***17% of remunerated female employment is in the domestic services sector. Despite Beijing, these workers are still not legally covered by the eight hours law.***

The proportion of poor and indigent households headed by women is nearly three times higher than the proportion of male headed households. Approximately 30% of children are born into homes where the basic needs are not satisfied. Despite these facts,

### WITH THEIR BACKS TO THE WORLD<sup>2</sup>

In several European countries, there is progress regarding the trials of military implicated in crimes against humanity. But in contrast to European trials, and to on-going trials in Argentina and Chile, not a single Uruguayan military has come before a judge or commission of inquiry. No government authority has acknowledged State Terrorism and no step has been taken in 15 years of democracy to truly investigate the whereabouts of persons who went missing after they were arrested by the military. No light has been shed on cases of forced disappearance.

The military has not undergone a process of self-criticism, nor has it assumed responsibility for the crimes committed. No foreign country has requested information, interrogation or extradition of any Uruguayan military.

the government has no policy—has not even issued a «declaration»—acknowledging the country's feminisation of poverty.

Finally, the government has given little political relevance to the Fourth World Conference on Women or to evaluating fulfilment of the Action Platform (unlike other countries in the region). This is underscored by the fact that women's organisations have relied exclusively on data obtained through their own studies and independent analysis. As this is written, it is still unknown if an official report exists.

- The National Commission for Monitoring the Beijing Agreements is formed by 56 women organisations in Uruguay. [comision@chasque.apc.org](mailto:comision@chasque.apc.org)

<sup>2</sup> From the 1999 report, «Human Rights in Uruguay». SERPAJ, Service of Peace and Justice. <serpaj@serpaj.org.uy>