For much of the twentieth century, researchers and policy analysts assumed that women migrated almost exclusively for marriage or family reunion. This gender stereotypical approach is disappearing as western governments turn their attention toward the prospective labour contributions of women from regions such as the Americas and the Caribbean, in order to fill key labour shortages in their economies. This recruitment likely will increase in the future. In 2015, nearly one third of all Canadians will be between the ages of 45 and 64 and one out of six will be 65 and older. In addition, low fertility rates from the 1970s onwards means that fewer young people are entering the workforce. As a result, there will not be enough Canadians to fill the labour positions created by baby boomer retirements. Adding to the labour crunch, Canadians are living longer, meaning that increased pressures will be placed on healthcare and care-giving sectors – areas of the Canadian labour market that are already experiencing financial pressures and labour shortages. Together these demographic and economic factors create a pressing need to recruit female labour from abroad.

Today, about one in five foreign-born women who are in the core working ages (20-64) and who are in the labour force are from the United States, the Caribbean, and Central and South America. Most are permanent residents. However, around two per cent are here temporarily because they are working while they study, or they have come as domestic workers under Canada’s Live-in Caregiver Program, or they are waiting for the resolution of refugee claims. One quarter is from the U.S., while the remainder come from other countries.
Note from the Editor

Gender is a word being tossed around a lot these days. Gender and Development, gender-based violence, gender studies, gender advisors… the list goes on. Yet, while people in international development circles are well-versed in gender lingo, those outside this small circle have many misconceptions on what the term means or why it is important. In academia, for example, gender analysis is often relegated to “women's studies.” Even in the rare instance that another department offers a gender course, the students who register are almost entirely women. Likewise, gender-based violence has become nearly synonymous with violence against women, even though many men and boys are also violently targeted solely because of their sex. Groups applying for funding from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) must include a gender component in their applications — but how many of them actually understand what this means, rather than simply inserting a vague promise to “incorporate gender awareness”?

While those who specialize in gender studies or gender-based analysis know otherwise, the word “gender” is so commonly associated with women that men often feel excluded from the debate. This is certainly notable in FOCALPoint, where all of the articles for the current issue on gender were written by women. Likewise, in areas such as conflict studies or economics, where male professors may dismissively claim that they “don’t do gender” while analyzing everything from a very masculine and patriarchal point of view. In fact, these men “do gender” very well — they simply do not realize it.

After all, the point of taking a gendered perspective is not to look at everything from a female point of view. There are many women who do not understand gender analysis at all and some men who understand it perfectly. Rather, the purpose is to look at how various aspects of life — such as conflict, economics, research, poverty and development — affect men, women, boys and girls differently. Because the male perspective has been predominant for so long, current gender analysis tends to lean towards women. However, the lack of men doing serious gender research or working as gender advisors means there is still a dearth of research on masculinity and its impact on issues such as armed violence, small arms, urban gangs, human trafficking and much more. The current failing in gender studies is that we have leaned so far towards studying women that we have missed critical analyses of the interactions between men and women and how different gender ideologies affect one another.

While sex (i.e., being male or female) is biological, gender is a socially constructed concept of the behavioural, cultural or physical traits associated with each sex. As a result, ideals of femininity cannot exist without corresponding ideals of masculinity, and vice versa. This makes it impossible to look at women without also looking at men, which is particularly clear when addressing violence against women. We can “empower” women, but unless we also address the men why they are being violent, we will never solve the problem. The same goes for HIV/AIDS — we can give more control to women by inventing female condoms and other protective measures — but unless we also address male behaviour, the problem persists. Addressing gender issues is therefore not about advancing a feminist agenda — it is about creating new and effective policies for both men and women in many different areas, including issues of race and inequality.

This is, of course, not new information to those working on gender analysis. However, it is still relatively obscure outside of these circles. It is a failing of the research community to accurately capture why gender is so important to all of us, not just to women and not just to those working in development. Unless we engage both men and women in the debate, we will never fully understand what is going on, and we will continue to perpetrate inequalities — just of a different kind.

Rachel Schmidt
in the Americas.

Why do these women migrate? Although there are many reasons, this complex decision-making process can largely be explained by factors within home countries pushing them to leave, and particular conditions abroad pulling them towards certain destination countries. One of the most significant factors pushing women to migrate is the level of economic opportunity in their home country. For instance, Mexico and Jamaica have been among the top 10 sending regions of temporary female workers to Canada for the past 10 years. It is not coincidental that the OECD finds that Mexican women’s unemployment is higher than that of men’s or that the Statistical Institute of Jamaica reports that the unemployment rate for women in Jamaica is two times higher than their male counterparts. On the other side of this migratory system are factors in western countries, such as labour shortages and the prospect of higher wages, that entice Latin American and Caribbean women to migrate to these regions.

This migration is not entirely a win-win situation. It can provide female migrants with increased employment opportunities and wages, but there are negative consequences as well. One is the increasing loss of skilled workers from developing to developed countries. There are only so many skilled female workers to go around, and the sending countries are equally in need of these migratory skilled workers (for example, nurses and caregivers) to meet the needs of their own population.

Moreover, home governments experience a net loss in terms of their investment in these workers while they were going through the education system. In addition to these national consequences, migrant women face significant personal and professional challenges. For instance, research indicates that foreign trained nurses of colour may experience limited promotion and hiring opportunities, difficulties having their foreign credentials recognized and racist comments from patients.

However, there also are many benefits from migration for women. First, their increased income results in a higher living standard for their families at home when money is sent back to these families. While one might be sceptical of the size of these individual monetary flows, remittances of Mexican migrants have surpassed all other types of foreign direct investment flowing into the country. Another benefit of migration is an increased level of empowerment and independence. Rather than being financially dependent on their partners, female migrant workers often become the family’s main income earners. Consequently, they gain more influence over household decision-making processes. Finally, if these women cannot find employment at home, their skills will be underused, thereby creating a situation of “brain waste.” By migrating abroad, they can apply their skills while meeting a vital need in the receiving country.

Overall, the situation before us is not clear-cut. Female migration to Canada from the developing Southern Hemisphere countries should not be summarily labelled as an unethical brain drain or exploitation. Migration can bring positive benefits to both sending and receiving countries. But ensuring positive benefits requires good management. Global responsibility means that developed countries that are recruiting workers — including immigrant women — need to incorporate mechanisms that facilitate
the economic growth of developing countries.

These mechanisms include, but are not limited to, reducing the cost of sending remittances through formal channels, the encouragement of temporary and return migration, the establishment of bilateral treaties, the encouragement of mutually beneficial brain circulation, the regulation of recruitment agencies, and the establishment of best practices consisting of procedures and processes known to be effective in obtaining results.

For migrant women currently in Canada, other actions include using gender-based perspectives in order to respond to the specific needs of these women as a growing proportion of the population, and workforce. For example, governments need to understand how domestic and childcare responsibilities of female migrants restrict their ability to take professional and/or language courses.

In turn, these and other factors specific to women limit the time they require to train for licensing tests or create barriers in finding employment. Tellingly, the College of Nurses of Ontario (2007) finds that over 50 per cent of nurses trained outside Ontario have failed their licensing exams since 2000. Not addressing the reasons for this phenomenon may result in a “brain waste” not only for sending and receiving countries, but also for the migrant women themselves.

Monica Boyd holds a Canada Research Chair and is a professor of Sociology at the University of Toronto. Joanne Nowak is a PhD candidate in Sociology at the University of Toronto.

**Write for FOCALPoint**

We are currently seeking submissions for our 2008 issues. Articles should be 700-900 words, analytical in style and regionally focused on the Americas. We welcome articles from all disciplines in English, French or Spanish. For details on our submission guidelines and deadlines, please visit www.focal.ca or contact the editor at: rschmidt@focal.ca

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**Rural to Urban Migration in Latin America**

![Bar Chart]

*Source: ECLAC, Social Panorama of Latin America 2007.*
No Girls Allowed?
Recruitment and Gender in Colombian Armed Groups

Rachel Schmidt

The role of gender ideologies in the recruitment practices of non-state armed groups has received little, if any, research attention. Yet, the overwhelming machismo in many conflict zones and the links between guns and masculinity both play large roles in encouraging boys and men to join armed groups. These factors also affect girls and women, but in distinctly different ways.

In Colombia, for example, the existing patriarchal structures exaggerate the gender-based violence perpetrated by armed actors. Female attraction to powerful men with guns and/or uniforms can also influence both male and female involvement in these groups. As a result, the Colombian conflict reinforces gendered stereotypes and heightens gender-based violence both in the home and in war. The overwhelming presence of armed actors in many poor communities, both urban and rural, can exaggerate gender norms as armed actors fight for community control and often use women and girls to do so.

While the left-wing FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) guerrillas boast large numbers of female combatants and claim to be egalitarian, the right-wing paramilitary groups operating in Colombia rarely place females on the frontlines and have never professed to defend women’s rights. In fact, of gender are elements that continue to distinguish the armed factions. In some ways, however, this difference is largely symbolic. Both the guerrillas and paramilitaries have perpetrated high levels of violence against women, including the imposition of gendered behaviours and values such as dress codes, forced abortions and mandatory birth control. Although guerrillas do have females in command positions, both groups continue to be run by all-male executives. Inside the ranks and in communities, women and girls continue to be targeted for systematic sexual violence as a way for men to control and humiliate their enemies.

Women and girls are estimated to make up 25-50 per cent of FARC units, an unusually high number in any military organization, yet they do not have a strong presence in paramilitary groups or urban gangs. This suggests two distinct research questions: 1) do girls prefer to join the guerrillas over the gangs or paramilitary groups? and/or 2) do the gangs and paramilitary groups exclude women and girls, while the guerrillas actively recruit them?

The field research on which this
article is based found that the recruiters’ preferences had a much stronger influence on the gender ratios in Colombian armed groups than the girls’ preferences. While further study is required on this topic, girls who decided to run away and/or join an armed group are often very limited in their choices depending on what zone they live in. If they are in a guerrilla zone, they can often join the guerrillas as combatants. If they are in a paramilitary or “mixed” zone, however, their options were much more limited, as the paramilitaries generally recruit females for marginalized support services and sexual roles, rather than as combatants.

Girls coming out of the FARC have also testified to being deceived and misled about the length of commitment and the type of life they would have in the guerrilla ranks. In fact, the use of misinformation by the FARC to recruit both boys and girls appears to be very high. While FARC commanders argue that women join the group because of the group’s feminist and socialist ideologies, testimonies from former child soldiers counter this view. According to a 2006 study by UNICEF, as well as several other recent reports on child recruitment in Colombia, ideology is the least cited reason for minors to join either the guerrillas or paramilitaries. Field research for this study also indicated that minors in areas of high recruitment knew very little about the greater armed conflict or the ideologies driving the various groups. It is therefore difficult to argue that the presence of girls and women in the FARC is due entirely to the FARC’s ideology and that girls are well-informed before they join. Rather, it seems to be the recruitment tactics and preferences of the “gatekeepers” (i.e., the recruiters) that determine these very different gender ratios.

The active recruitment of girls by the FARC also appears to be both an ideological and operational issue. The higher presence of females allows the group to retain its (weakening) political image as advocates of social change, while also boosting recruitment levels. Because the FARC has relied on social resources (e.g., promises of social and political change) from its inception, a switch to economic incentives to recruit new members — such as paid salaries — would further deteriorate the group’s political image. However, the ongoing failure to fulfill these promises means that the FARC must find other ways to recruit new members. As adults are less likely to support a group that continually falls short of its stated goals, children become the obvious recruits because they are more easily influenced and/or intimidated.

The paramilitaries, however, have the financial resources to hire recruits, so they do not necessarily need promises of future change to increase their ranks. While this may result in recruits who are less committed to the cause, it also means that relying on children, and especially girls, is unnecessary. Because the paramilitaries are built on the male military tradition and are known to be highly aggressive and machista (i.e., hyper-masculine), a visible presence of females would diminish this image and counter the traditional values for which many paramilitary factions claim to be fighting. While girls and women have played (and do play) important roles in paramilitary structure

**Rift between Colombia and Venezuela**

Negotiations between the Colombian government and country’s main guerilla group, the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), are in jeopardy after Colombian president Alvaro Uribe’s decision to withdraw Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez from his role as mediator. The proposed trade of 45 captives held hostage by the FARC in exchange for 500 imprisoned FARC fighters is now on hold. The family and friends of the hostages, as well as French president Nicolas Sarkozy, were disappointed at the removal of Chavez, who they feel was making progress with the formerly intractable guerillas. However, his unorthodox style of diplomacy, which allegedly included communicating with both FARC commanders and Colombian military officials, without Uribe’s permission, motivated the Colombian president’s decision to withdraw Chavez. Concern that the Chavez-led negotiations could generate worldwide attention and sympathy for FARC’s political cause, also aggravated the relationship between Chavez and Uribe. Chavez has now stated that he will have “no ties” with Colombia while Uribe is still president. This could have serious economic repercussions, as the two nations are each other’s second biggest trading partners (after the U.S.), with annual bilateral trade of more than USD$4 billion.
and function, research for this study found that their presence is marginalized because they are not usually fighters. In addition, the bias of both international and local organizations to focus on combatants means that girls and women are often ignored in demobilization and reintegration processes.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that the gatekeepers' characteristics are more important than the recruits themselves in explaining the gender disparity among different Colombian armed groups. The groups' preferences seem to trump the preferences of young recruits regarding when and why girls are allowed to join particular groups. While economic and social resources are important in explaining different recruitment methodologies, gender-based analysis is equally critical in understanding the social controls imposed by different types of organized armed violence. The sex ratios across different groups might be overstated because females are marginalized in paramilitaries and gangs, but there is still a marked difference in how the various armed factions approach the involvement of females in their ranks.

Finally, this study indicates that further research on machismo and gender-based violence is especially critical in Colombia, as gendered expectations seem to play a prominent role in the recruitment of children and adolescents into organized armed violence. The persistent lack of information on girls in fighting forces illustrates the continued assumption that girls are not primary actors in armed conflicts and therefore do not warrant significant research attention.

In addition, the general omission of gender analysis in conflict studies reflects the bias that issues of gender are not integral to understanding the key drivers of conflict. Yet, when sexual violence is endemic in a conflict, and one of the armed groups has prominent female combatants while the others do not, no analysis can be complete without addressing gender and its relationship to violence and power.

Rachel Schmidt is the Director of Communications and Editor-in-Chief at FOCAL. This article is based on the author's thesis of the same title, which was completed in August 2007 as part of her MA degree at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs. The thesis also includes an analysis of girls in Colombian gangs, which was omitted from this article for space reasons. The thesis is available in PDF format upon request. rschmidt@focal.ca

### Indigent and Non-Indigent Poverty in Latin America

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<th>Year</th>
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Source: ECLAC, Social Panorama of Latin America 2007
According to Guatemala’s Truth Commission, sexual and reproductive violence (SRV) against women was used as a military and strategic tactic of warfare during the Guatemalan conflict between 1962 and 1995. The majority of victims of SRV were poor, illiterate indigenous Mayan women, and women’s gender roles played a central part in their victimization. The armed actors used the threat of violence against women in their roles as activists, mothers, caregivers and wives to achieve various purposes: humiliate, pressure others to provide information, intimidate, punish for any real or perceived support to the enemy, and instill terror.

Women and girls who have suffered gender-based violence are often reluctant to pursue any form of redress or treatment for a variety of reasons. Some fear stigmatization or re-victimization, and others carry survivor guilt or consider their suffering to be insignificant when compared to the fate of loved ones who have been severely maimed or killed. Whatever the reason, the reality is that victims of SRV often feel the psychological trauma of what has happened for months or even years. The resulting effects upon women’s mental and physical health can be debilitating and long-lasting: survivors in Guatemala have reported depression, anxiety, nightmares, low self-esteem, cognitive impairment, loss of social competence, body image concerns and substance abuse.

In the post-conflict period, multiple national and international actors, including the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), are jointly addressing the diverse social, economic, political and psychological needs of victims, including survivors of SRV. Since January of 2005, IDRC has been supporting the work of “Actoras de Cambio,” a consortium of international and national women’s and human rights organizations to support the project “From victims of armed conflict to agents for change: Women’s struggle for justice.” The consortium includes a mixture of feminist organizations, more traditional human rights NGOs and a research institution that specializes in psychosocial issues and approaches to victim empowerment. “From victims to change agents” is an ambitious, multi-year project whose principal goal is to promote a political process for psychosocial healing and the empowerment of women survivors through the recovery of their historical memory and the use of legal avenues for securing justice.

While psychosocial models for community-based mental health interventions are diverse, flexible and constantly changing, the approach being used by Actoras de Cambio is based upon feminist principles and aims to achieve a number of important outcomes. First, since for a variety of reasons victims of SRV often do not construe what has happened to them as a human rights violation (for which they are not to blame), the approach being used by the Consortium works with victims in order to bring greater clarity to events in the past and raise consciousness around victims’ rights to truth, justice and reparation. Implementing such efforts in small indigenous communi-
ties is particularly challenging since NGOs working on women’s rights to justice and reparation can be viewed with suspicion and accused of stirring things up or “waking old ghosts.” Building awareness of rights and individual experiences of SRV is considered to be a necessary initial step for achieving a shared understanding and solidarity first among female victims, and then between the victims and their families/communities.

These linkages are particularly difficult in some communities where widows are scorned and distrusted. Widowhood is not automatically accompanied by “gender solidarity.” In Guatemala, women on their own are often perceived as a threat to other women in the community. Similarly, re-building bonds between women and their families — who often are unaware that their wife/mother/sister/aunt has been a victim of SRV — is also a painfully slow business and a second critical outcome that often is not time bound. Still, affected women in these communities express relief at being able to share the burden of what has happened with other survivors and draw a sense of belonging and healing by knowing that they are not alone.

The work of the consortium has achieved some success in building victims’ knowledge of their rights. In one community that has come through more than three years of collective therapeutic exercises, 25 women recently decided to break their silence and give their testimonies to officials of the state-sponsored National Reparation Program.

The above achievements should not suggest that psychosocial programs alone can act as a magic bullet for all of women's mental health and development needs in the aftermath of political violence. It is meant instead to illustrate the power that such approaches can have in helping women see beyond victimhood and imagine transformative possibilities, especially when coupled with other measures for economic recovery and development. Consortium researchers are documenting how the results of ongoing psychosocial support can influence women’s sense of dignity and self-confidence, shifts that have a positive impact on physical well-being and can be detected over time by changes in these women’s voices and physical posture. The work of the Actoras de Cambio also highlights the importance of using culturally grounded tools that allow survivors to process what has happened to them in ways that are often less invasive and more meaningful, paving the way if not to definite closure, then to possibilities to reestablish a daily existence free of guilt, shame and other emotions that typically torment survivors of SRV. The researchers’ use of life stories or oral testimonies grounded in easily identifiable symbols (such as a life being represented by a river) helps to put survivors at ease. So, for example, a victim of SRV can understand her experience not as one of ongoing personal responsibility for something that she did or did not do, but as an episode that fits into a larger and more complex picture of the social and political landscape.

Much remains to be done for those struggling for truth, justice and reparation in Guatemala today. The Actoras de Cambio are proving that by recognizing and denouncing gender-based political violence, female survivors of SRV may incrementally be able to assume important roles in the transformation of their individual life projects, in addition to the transformation of their communities and the nation.

Colleen Duggan is a Senior Program Specialist at the International Development Research Centre. Researchers from the “From victims to change agents” project will be publishing their full findings in early 2008.

Brazil’s Eight Billion Barrels of New Oil

Petroleo Brasileiro (Petrobas), Brazil’s state oil company, announced on November 8, 2007, that its Tupi oil field is projected to produce eight billion barrels of light crude. Located about 300 kilometers south of Rio de Janeiro, the offshore oil field is part of the Santos basin. Petrobas controls the firm that holds exclusive rights to exploit the find and is expected to move ahead of Shell and Chevron to become the company with the third largest total oil reserves, behind only Exxon and British Petroleum. The oil reportedly lies in 2,000 metres of water, under 3,000 metres of sand and rocks and another 2,000-metre thick layer of salt. Exploitation of the field is expected to begin in 2013, and could dramatically change regional dynamics. Currently, Brazil imports light crude, much of which comes from Bolivia, in order to refine its domestically extracted heavy crude. Now Brazil may soon become one of the top ten oil exporting countries.
Cross-border human trafficking is accelerating at an alarming rate across the globe. According to the U.S. State Department, approximately 80 per cent of the 800,000 trafficked persons worldwide are women or girls. Most of them are forced into the commercial sex trade, sex-related work or domestic labour.

The Americas region has not escaped this problematic situation: approximately 100,000 women are trafficked out of Latin America each year. Interpol estimates that in Colombia alone, 35,000 women per year are trafficked to regions as far off as Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East. Trafficking within the region is also a problem: in Brazil, for example, women are forced to work with criminal networks smuggling drugs across borders.

While the true scope of trafficking flows remains murky, human trafficking has become a key agenda item in policy circles in the region. The U.S. has taken the lead, publishing an annual Report on Trafficking that monitors the performance of governments on anti-trafficking strategies. Furthermore, regional dialogues such as the Puebla Process involving 11 countries in Central and North America, including Canada, have prioritized trafficking in ongoing high-level discussions.

While these efforts represent a step forward, most governments have adopted a national security framework — rather than a human security approach — in formulating anti-trafficking strategies. This has resulted, for example, in increased police investigations, prosecutions of criminals and repatriation of trafficked women.

Arguably, a human security framework would be more useful or would at least improve current efforts to address this phenomenon. Human security, a concept launched by the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report, has two main components: 1) freedom from want (such as hunger, disease and poverty) and 2) freedom from fear (such as violence or repression). While “freedom from fear” has generally been accepted by governments rather than the all-comprising “freedom from want,” both ideas remain important as they stress a people-centered approach to understanding security.

A human security lens should be applied to a policy approach to trafficking for two reasons: first, to employ a people-centered approach to prevention and protection efforts, revealing the gendered nature of trafficking flows and second, to address the determinants of migrants, including those who become trafficked. Moreover, a human security framework would situate human trafficking within dialogues on international migration.

On closer examination of the determinants to leave home, many trafficked women — like migrants in general — begin their journeys voluntarily. What they evidently do not consent to, however, is the exploitative practices to which they are subjected by their trafficking ring. This runs counter to current narratives on international trafficking of women that relegate women to the status of “victims” who are exploited by a ruthless criminal en route...
or in destination countries. While certainly a part of the truth, there are many reasons why a woman (or man) may choose to enter into an agreement with an intermediary to cross a border. As has been documented by the U.S. State Department report, in Latin America and elsewhere, the trafficker might be a close friend or even a family member. In these cases, economic motivations, such as desires for profits or simply the desire to provide a better life for one's family and children, usually fuel the traffic in women. These cases point to the strong desire for freedom from want.

But there are important non-economic determinants feeding trafficking networks as well. Many women choose to migrate due to social or cultural causes, including forced marriages, violence in the family, lack of inheritance rights or the stigmatized status of being a widow or single mother. They also often flee violent conflict, or are caught up in situations of prolonged displacement. These are pressing cases of human insecurity that must be addressed. There is some evidence that trafficking of women proliferates in countries where criminal networks are entrenched in the arms or drugs trade. Volatile regions such as Brazil and Colombia may be particularly concerning in this regard.

As Don Hubert, Canadian architect of the Landmines Treaty process, has argued, “the security or insecurity of others has become very much our own security or insecurity.” In the Latin American region, human insecurity has translated into large flows of illicit migrants (not only South-North but South-South) as well as the flourishing of cross-border criminal networks that undermine state sovereignty. This is a poor scenario both for nation states as well as the well-being of individuals.

Yet the broader implications of employing a human security framework go well beyond a desire to minimize the flow of irregular migrants. Such a framework would focus more attention on the root causes of migration (including violent conflict, gender discrimination, distortions in forces of supply and demand, among others). If findings of the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW) suggest that “many people will migrate regardless of their knowledge of the dangers of trafficking” are correct, then these root causes may be more powerful than we think. Correspondingly, there is great need to identify the high-risk areas of insecurity in the Americas region in order to target support for trafficking prevention programs where they are needed most. A people-centered approach would also address the protection of trafficked women at each stage of the migration process, including at points of interception and return. Moreover, if a long term solution is to be found, governments should consider increasing the legal avenues for labour migration, especially for women.

Finally, an interdisciplinary research agenda mapping the links between human security and migration — including the trafficking of women — would be instrumental in informing policymakers in future.

Barb Maclaren is the Project Manager for FOCAL’s Migration Project. For the international definition of “Trafficking in Persons,” see the UN Protocol to Suppress, Prevent and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (Article 3). bmaclaren@focal.ca

**Ecuador: Congress v. Constituent Assembly**

Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa, elected in December 2006 on his campaign for constitutional reform, has made a significant step forward in his fight against what he views as a corrupt congress. Contrary to the Congress, the new Constituent Assembly—the creation of which was overwhelmingly supported by voters who chose its members in a September election—is largely composed of members of Correa’s Alianza Pais party (80 out of 130 seats). In an attempt to prove independence from the Assembly, Correa tendered his resignation, but the body later confirmed his presence in office. The Constituent Assembly is set to convene for six months to draft a new constitution which will then be put to a national referendum for approval. Correa’s initiative has been branded as an attack on democracy by those who are concerned about a rapprochement with Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales, as well as a concentration of power in the president’s hands. Correa defends the move as necessary in order to make Ecuador a more just society and address the problem of political instability which has plagued the Andean nation over the past decade.
Weavers of Life, Wisdom and Peace: Colombia’s Indigenous Women

Gloria Amparo Rodriguez

Colombian indigenous women play an important and vibrant role within their cultures, economies and community structure. They are life-givers, knowledge-bearers and peace-builders for their people.

These women, who also contribute to the economy of their communities with their handicrafts, bear the brunt of the suffering when their territories are violated, their husbands murdered, or when they are forced to leave their farms and orchards as a result of the armed conflict in Colombia. They know that life, theirs and their children’s, is more important than anything else, and so they flee their territories in the face of danger.

It is impossible to ignore the fact that Colombian Indigenous women are victims of rape, massacres, torture, forced disappearance and displacement. Widows must take on the leadership role at home as well as preserve the Indigenous social structure and the cultural experience of their people.

Healthcare and social welfare. There is also a pressing need to address their long-standing invisibility in the eyes of policy and decision makers. That is why they call upon the Government to guarantee their access to good healthcare services that recognize their needs and cultures. They also ask to be afforded intercultural and bilingual education that does not discriminate against their Indigenous heritage, thus realizing their right to be educated and the possibility of building their capacities at all levels and at least on equal footing with the rest of the national community.

As weavers of peace, the Indigenous women of Colombia ask for respect for their right to their territories, guarantees for their right to full participation, and conditions of equality for their contributions to decision-making processes affecting issues of concern regarding their lives and that of their community. They fight for their right to live in peace, in dignified conditions that allow for the protection of their cultural rights and the development of their lives.

The enormous cultural impact of the Indigenous woman on the community’s daily life is ever-present, starting with the folk stories told by mothers and grandmothers in their role as keepers and conduits of their people’s cultural lore. They interweave oral pieces of knowledge, often as they sit by the fire preparing food, hand-moulding pottery or weaving blankets, hammocks or rucksacks. There they tell their children and grandchildren of their ancestors, of their history, of life in the community, and of how they have managed to survive throughout time. In this way they teach their language and strengthen their world view and culture.
submitted throughout history. Ultimately, this exclusion has had a debilitating effect on their culture, influencing changes in the social dynamics of their communities. Numerous challenges remain in upholding the rights of Indigenous women and of Indigenous peoples in general, all of which are linked to the recognition and protection of the cultural heritage of our nation.

All actions must start out with the protection and promotion of human rights, in order to sensitize public opinion and create awareness of these issues affecting Indigenous women. Spaces for reflection in defence of human rights are needed so that the rights enshrined in international agreements and legislation become more than mere expectations in Colombia; they must become something real.

Public policies as well as solid and effective legislation are necessary to contribute to the strengthening of the Indigenous women’s identity through the affirmation, beginning with their own assertiveness as Indigenous women, of their own culture and the promotion and practice of equitable relations; in this way, it is also possible to strengthen the roles of women as leaders of the communities and guarantee the effective protection of the Indigenous woman against all forms of discrimination.

The Colombian State has failed to formulate specific policies aimed at actively ensuring the improvement of the Indigenous women’s situation and we strongly believe that it is time to act.

Finally, we must recognize the Indigenous women’s contribution to the tapestry of our nation and to the preservation of the Indigenous peoples’ ethnic and cultural identity because the Indigenous women of Colombia are weavers of life, wisdom and peace.

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Tejedoras de Vida, de Sabres y de Paz: Las Mujeres Indígenas de Colombia

Gloria Amparo Rodríguez

Las mujeres indígenas colombianas juegan un papel importante y dinamizador dentro de sus culturas, economías y organización comunitaria. De ellas brota la vida para constituirse en promotoras de los saberes de sus pueblos y constructoras de paz.

Son esas mujeres las que además contribuyen con sus artesanías a la economía de sus comunidades pero a la vez, son las que sufren cuando sus territorios son violentados, sus esposos son asesinados o cuando deben abandonar sus tierras y sus huertos (chacras), como consecuencia del conflicto armado que afronta Colombia. Ellas saben que lo más importante es la vida, su vida y la de sus hijos, por eso deben dejar sus territorios cuando se encuentran en peligro.

No es posible ignorar que las mujeres indígenas de Colombia son víctimas de violaciones, masacres, torturas, desaparición forzada y desplazamiento. Las viudas deben asumir las riendas del hogar y salvaguardar la estructura social indígena y la vivencia cultural de su pueblo.

El gobierno Colombiano no cuenta ni con políticas públicas ni con acciones concretas para enfrentar esta problemática. Las mujeres indígenas de nuestro país demandan por mejorar su situación de desigualdad que se refleja en aspectos tales como la educación, la salud, la seguridad social y el derecho a la educación y la posibilidad de adquirir una capacitación a todos los niveles, por lo menos en pie de igualdad con el resto de la comunidad nacional.

De otro lado, como tejedoras de paz, las mujeres indígenas de Colombia piden que se respete el derecho a sus territorios, que se garantice su derecho a la participación plena y que puedan contribuir en condiciones de igualdad en la toma de decisiones en aquellos asuntos de su interés para su vida y para su comunidad. Las mujeres luchan por su derecho a vivir en paz, en condiciones dignas que permitan la protección de sus derechos culturales y el desarrollo de sus vidas.

En la vida cotidiana de la comunidad se evidencia la enorme influencia cultural de la mujer indígena, que empieza con los relatos de las abuelas o de las madres que son las encargadas de transmitir el saber. Ellas tejen conocimientos de manera oral y, generalmente, entorno al fuego, cuando preparan alimentos, cuando fabrican sus cerámicas o mientras tejen sus mantas, sus chinchorros o sus mochilas. Allí les hablan a sus hijos y nietos, de sus ancestros, de su historia, de su vida en la comunidad y de la forma como han tenido que pervivir a
lo largo del tiempo. De esta manera enseñan la lengua y fortalecen su cosmovisión y su cultura.

La situación de vulnerabilidad, de discriminación y racismo que viven las mujeres indígenas colombianas, hace que la reivindicación de sus derechos específicos se constituya en un elemento fundamental para contrarrestar las profundas formas de exclusión a las que han sido sometidas a través de la historia, terminando por debilitar su cultura e incidiendo en los cambios de la dinámica social de sus comunidades. Hay muchos retos que debemos asumir en defensa de los derechos de las mujeres y de los pueblos indígenas en general, los cuales están referidos al reconocimiento y protección del patrimonio cultural de nuestra Nación.

Todo debe partir de la protección de los derechos humanos y de la difusión de los mismos, con el fin de sensibilizar y crear conciencia sobre esta problemática de las mujeres indígenas. Se requiere de espacios de reflexión en su defensa para que los derechos consagrados en las normas y convenios internacionales sean algo más que una expectativa en Colombia, que sean algo real.

Se debe contribuir a través de políticas públicas y de una legislación eficaz y consistente, en el fortalecimiento de la identidad a través de la afirmación de la cultura propia y la difusión y práctica de las relaciones equitativas desde la propia autoafirmación como mujeres indígenas; de esta forma se puede además potenciar los roles de las mujeres líderes de las comunidades y así lograr garantizar la protección efectiva de la mujer indígena contra toda forma de discriminación.

El Estado colombiano está en deuda de formular políticas específicas para asegurar de manera activa, el mejoramiento de la situación de la mujer indígena y sin la menor duda, creemos que ya es hora de hacer.

Finalmente, debemos reconocer el aporte realizado por las mujeres indígenas a la construcción del país y a la conservación de la identidad étnica y cultural, porque las mujeres indígenas de Colombia son tejedoras de vida, de saberes y de paz.

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Chavez Loses Reform Vote

On December 2, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez lost his controversial referendum by a narrow margin, with 51 per cent voting against the proposed changes and 49 per cent voting in favour. This marks the first electoral loss for Chavez since he took office in 1999. The key proposals in the referendum included: indefinite re-election of the president, with terms increased from six to seven years; ending the autonomy of the Central Bank; re-organizing the country’s administrative districts; cutting the standard work day from eight hours to six; lowering the voting age from 18 to 16; and extending social security benefits to those working in the informal sector.

Many opponents to the reform were concerned that the changes would erode democracy in Venezuela and give Chavez too much power. When Chavez conceded defeat, he said that the referendum was a sign that Venezuelan democracy was “maturing.” Indeed, by conceding defeat he was able to to renew a democratic image against criticism that he has been trying to create a dictatorship. However, he also said that the reforms had only failed “for now,” indicating that he may try to push them again sometime in the future.

Analysts say that many consistent Chavez supporters voted against him in the referendum, as they felt that their leader had pushed the agenda too far, especially in regards to the possibility that he could stay on as president indefinitely. According to the current rules, he must step down from office in 2013.
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