

# Beyond Barriers

## The Gender Implications of Trade Liberalization in Latin America

Vivianne Ventura-Dias

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## Abstract

Trade and trade policy affect both men and women as workers, producers and consumers, but affect women in particular because of their role as care providers within households and communities.

This paper reviews major trends in trade liberalization in Latin America and the empirical literature on the gendered impacts of that liberalization. Empirical studies on gender impacts of trade liberalization in Latin American countries can be roughly divided into four groups. The first group focuses on the size and characteristics of female employment generated by non-traditional agro-export industries. The second focuses on the impacts of trade liberalization on female participation in urban labour markets. The third concerns studies on the informal urban sector, while the fourth addresses the impact of the liberal agenda on female smallholder or peasant production, a phenomenon associated with an increase in female headed rural households.

The results of the literature review are mixed: the literature shows that a woman's bargaining power and autonomy within the household depends on her ability to generate income and access to assets. Women may gain more autonomy if they have paid work, but their working conditions are unstable, and are characterized by lack of job security and work related benefits.

## About the author

**Vivianne Ventura-Dias** has a PhD in Agricultural and Natural Resources Economics from the University of California, Berkeley, and lives in Florianopolis, Santa Catarina, Brazil. She was a founding member of the Latin American Trade Network is currently an associate professor in the Institute of International Relations at Federal University of Santa Catarina. She is an international consultant on trade and trade negotiations, and has written widely on the distributive aspects of trade, trade related rules and global integration, in particular on the gender equity dimension of these areas.

From June 1989 to December 2003, she worked with the United Nations Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), holding research and management positions. She directed the Division of International Trade and Integration in Santiago de Chile (1999–2003) and the ECLAC Brazilian office (1993–95). From 1987 to 1989 she provided technical expertise to the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Relations during the Uruguay Round negotiations. She was a visiting fellow at the Center of International Studies in the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University (October 1997–March 1998) and associate professor of International Relations in the Department of Political Sciences and International Relations at the University of Brasília (1988–93).

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International Institute for Sustainable Development  
161 Portage Avenue East, 6th Floor  
Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada R3B 0Y4  
Tel: (204) 958-7700 Fax: (204) 958-7710  
E-mail: [info@iisd.ca](mailto:info@iisd.ca)  
Web site: <http://www.iisd.org>

Beyond Barriers: The Gender Implications of Trade Liberalization in Latin America  
Vivianne Ventura-Dias

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

CAN	Andean Community (Comunidad Andina)
FTA	free trade agreement
FTAA	Free Trade Area of the Americas
GDP	gross domestic product
ILO	International Labour Organization
Mercosur	Southern Common Market (Mercado Común del Sur)
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Area
WTO	World Trade Organization

## Executive Summary

Trade and trade policy affect both men and women as workers, producers and consumers, but women in particular, because of their role as care providers within households and communities. Trade expansion and trade policy affect men and women differently because gender relations impinge on the individual access of men and women to productive resources and trade benefits. It should not be forgotten, however, that within gender groups, inequalities can be even greater than between groups. In other words, within male and female groups, access to economic opportunities and assets is a critical function of factors such as social class, race, ethnicity and rural-urban characteristics that are at the origin of individual resource endowments.

The debate on the social and economic impacts of trade and trade policy entails a considerable degree of conceptual and methodological ambiguity. The theory recognizes that trade policy generates deliberate redistributive effects in terms of factor employment, since the primary objective of trade policy is to affect pre-existing conditions under which domestic and imported goods compete in domestic markets. Nevertheless, trade theory cannot deal adequately with unintended redistributive impacts at the job market and micro (household) level, for which a better understanding of mediating institutions between markets and households is essential.

It is in their multidimensional roles as workers or entrepreneurs, consumers and care providers that the majority of women experience the impact of macroeconomic policies, particularly trade policy, sometimes with conflicting results. Cheaper consumer (or industrial) goods may benefit women as consumers (or as producers), but they may lose their jobs if the enterprise they work for becomes less competitive than its foreign competitors. Jobs lost in enterprises that cannot measure up to the new foreign competition may be compensated for by jobs created in competitive exporting enterprises.

At the macro level, the size of female employment in exporting industries depends on country specific variables, since it is the nature of the international integration of each country, or its trade specialization, that will determine the characteristics of the demand for female labour. The correlation of manufactured exports and female employment has been due to the massive integration of Asian and a few other developing countries into international supply chains, where women perform the most labour intensive activities of the production complex (mostly in textiles and clothing, toys, and electronic products). Latin American<sup>1</sup> resource intensive exporting industries are not intensive employers of women, although women have also been intensively employed in the non-traditional agricultural exports of several countries such as Chile, Ecuador and Colombia.

There are already excellent surveys of the empirical literature on trade and gender, with a few of them also covering Latin America. A group of hypotheses from the literature can be summarized:

1. Women are widely employed in labour intensive exporting industries that tend to provide precarious jobs with few or no social benefits (in a process called the feminization of jobs). In this case, their welfare is directly affected by eventual job loss due to the lack of competitiveness of local exporting enterprises or by the reallocation of activities by large multinational enterprises searching for cheaper labour elsewhere.
2. Women are also widely employed in subsistence and family farm production that can be import competing. In this case, their welfare is affected by cheaper imports of agricultural products (which may be subsidized in the country of origin).

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the term Latin America refers to all Latin American countries, including those in South, Central and North America.

3. The technological intensification of productive systems tends to reduce the presence of women in the job market (known as the defeminization of jobs).
4. The nature of women's integration into labour markets brought about by trade liberalization and trade expansion can potentially challenge intrafamily relations. There is impressionistic evidence that in some cases finding employment in the exporting industry has improved women's bargaining power in the household.

At the micro level, trade liberalization will be felt in the household unit, since changes in the relative prices of goods and factors will have a bearing on intrahousehold decisions on production, consumption and labour supply. The welfare of household members depends on their monetary income as much as on the prices of goods and services that make up their consumption baskets. Trade and trade policy will affect household income through the effects on the prices and quantity of goods, services and assets that household members sell in the market for money, and also consume. In most cases, labour power is the only asset household members have to sell, although family production, rents, cash transfers through public policies and remittances from household members working abroad may also compose a significant part of individual monetary income. All these components of monetary income may be affected, firstly, by trade policy and, secondly, by the derived effect of the greater integration of the domestic economy into global markets (trade dynamics). Over time, trade liberalization and economic integration may affect the nature and level of market (and non-market) activities that women perform outside (and inside) the household, their share of their households' monetary income and the control they may exercise over their assets, thus moving gender relations towards more or less equity.

From the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, Latin American countries consolidated economic reforms, which included opening trade and capital markets to foreign flows, while in Chile and Uruguay the process started even earlier. After decades of major state intervention in domestic economies and the intense use of industrial policy to guide industrialization programmes, the region adopted a development model based on private agents' decisions with greater autonomy for the market mechanism governing resource allocation. Trade liberalization implied a deeper integration of Latin American economies into global markets for capital, goods and services, and full reliance on the export sector as an engine of growth.

It was not just a coincidence that the process of unilateral trade liberalization in the region, together with the deepening of multilateral trading rules, took place along with a new wave of regionalism. From a Latin American perspective, this new wave of regionalism also signalled the intention by governments to retain control over the pace and extent of trade liberalization. In South America, Mercosur (Mercado Común del Sur or Southern Common Market) was formally created through the Asuncion Treaty signed in March 1991 by the presidents of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. Later, Chile and Bolivia became associate members. The Andean Community (Comunidad Andina or CAN) is much older. The integration scheme started in 1969 as the Andean Pact or the Andean Group. In the early 1990s, the Andean governments decided to revive the regional integration scheme and created CAN.

Latin America is a heterogeneous set of economies at various levels of economic and institutional development. The majority of these economies have not succeeded in diversifying their productive structure towards internationally competitive manufacturing industries and have remained commodity exporters subject to the vagaries of international commodity prices. While all commodity exporters are affected by this structural external vulnerability, there are great differences among the implications of the agricultural and mineral mining industries for the development process, particularly in terms of generating backward and forward linkages with the rest of the economy, and in providing decent jobs.

Historically, mineral production and exports tend to create enclaves with little spillover to other sectors of the economy unless there is a deliberate effort by the state to promote linkages.

A rigorous assessment of trade and trade policy impacts on gender equity is hampered, firstly, by the lack of disaggregated data on male and female rural and urban activities. Secondly, when data is available, there are no time series to allow for quantifying changes in the conditions of female employment over time. In addition, it is important to keep in mind that the liberalization of domestic markets toward import competition in Latin America took place along with other components of the liberalization agenda (fiscal discipline, a tight monetary policy, market deregulation, the privatization of public assets and anti-inflationary macroeconomic policy). Because of the interactions among these policies, there are inherent problems in any attempt to isolate out the effects on gender equity of each concrete policy, as in the case of trade policy.

Gender inequality has many dimensions that stem from women's dual role in paid and unpaid activities performed in the market and non-market spheres of social life. Empirical research on gender and trade in Latin America has been predominantly focused on the nature of job opportunities and labour income brought by trade expansion, with a secondary focus on the impact on intrahousehold allocation and distribution of resources. Data and methodological problems explain the little empirical research on the estimation of the size of female labour reallocation in import competing industries as one of the direct costs of trade liberalization.

There are intrinsic data problems in quantifying changes caused by the liberalization agenda in the care sphere. Time use surveys provide information on the allocation of time by individual members of a household among different specified activities. It is a valuable source of data on who does what in caring for family members and house maintenance, in spite of all the limitations. However, there are great disparities in the scope and purpose of various surveys, and most datasets do not distinguish between the leisure time of a family member and the time each family member spends on household maintenance, management and caring for other family members. Moreover, only a small group of Latin American countries have included systematic data collection on time use in household surveys, and have done so only recently. The literature relies on case studies that combine quantitative and qualitative methods.

Empirical studies on the gender impacts of trade liberalization in Latin American countries can be divided roughly into four groups. The first group comprises studies focused on the size and characteristics of female employment generated by non-traditional agro-export industries. The second group is concentrated on the impacts of trade liberalization on female participation in urban labour markets. The third group comprises studies on the informal urban sector. Another important field of research addresses the impact of the liberal agenda on female smallholder or peasant production, a phenomenon associated with an increase in the share of female headed rural households.

Two major hypotheses that were generated by the literature on trade and gender in manufacturing exports are also valid for high value agricultural exports. The first concerns the nature of female jobs generated by the expansion of exports known as the 'feminization of exporting jobs' due to the working conditions of export processing operations. The basic hypothesis is that labour intensive exporting industries demand 'feminine' skills that include obedience, manual dexterity, patience, the acceptance of hierarchy and a lack of labour militancy. Women are sought because they are likely to accept working conditions unacceptable to men (lack of job security and work related benefits). The second, related, hypothesis refers to the 'glass ceiling' represented by the consequences of technological upgrading of exporting operations on female manufacturing jobs. Women are hired for unskilled 'feminine' jobs (sewing in textile operations, for instance) and they are replaced by men when technological upgrading



is introduced. Both hypotheses are validated in the cases of Latin American high value agricultural exports, with the caveat of insufficient data for rigorous conclusions.

In urban labour markets, data from household surveys show that over the past two decades in all Latin American countries there was a general expansion in female activity rates in all groups of women differentiated by age, income and years of schooling. Available empirical evidence shows that, after trade liberalization, labour markets were not functioning well and there was an unexpected mismatch between the skills that women (and men) could supply and those that the market was demanding. Consequently, unemployment hit the female working-age population harder when compared with the male population. High female unemployment rates must be added to underemployment data, since quite often women find jobs in less productive sectors such as personal and domestic services. On the positive side, women have increased their stock of human capital and there has been a general reduction in the male–female wage gap, although this decline does not always correlate positively with the number of schooling years. Conversely, empirical data shows that the male–female wage gap is higher in subgroups with more education.

During the period of trade liberalization, markets and public policies affected gender inequalities in terms of access to resources and opportunities, although the net results are not clear. To what extent have the policies implemented during the 1980s and 1990s exacerbated or reduced gender inequality? To give a precise and comprehensive answer to this question is nearly impossible. Moreover, liberal policies reached their zenith in the late 1990s, after a series of financial crises revealed Latin America's external vulnerability. On the other hand, other public policies were formulated to reduce social and gender inequities. The result is that at the end of the first decade of the 21st century, Latin American women in general are experiencing better social opportunities in accessing the 'constituents of development' (education, health, legal and civil rights, decent jobs, and political participation) than at any time previously. Concrete improvements in women's lives can be measured by reductions in fertility and in mortality rates, longer life expectancy, incentives for girls to attend primary and secondary schools, greater participation in political life and increased political representation.

## 1. Introduction

There is a broad agreement in the economic literature that trade liberalization has both costs and benefits, with the predominant view being that the long run benefits largely exceed short term costs. For many years, the debate on the costs of opening domestic markets to import competition was focused on the consequences for the export diversification of developing countries. Without market protection, it was believed that countries endowed with abundant natural resources and unskilled labour, as is the case of Latin American economies, were condemned to specialize in products reflecting this abundance.<sup>2</sup> It was only in the last two decades that distributive questions have moved, firstly, from intercountry to within country allocation of the gains from trade and, secondly, from macro to micro research connecting trade policy and trade expansion to social and gender inequality; i.e. with questions linking ‘macroeconomic policy instruments to the microeconomic level consequences of their deployment’ (Kanbur, 2009: xi). The quest for efficiency of resource allocation rather than equity still rules most mainstream trade models.

The contrast between the disappointing performance of newly open economies and the high expectations raised by the adoption of a liberalization agenda in the 1980s and early 1990s as part of structural adjustment programmes propelled by multilateral financial institutions brought to the fore the social implications of that agenda. Uniform macroeconomic strategies included trade and capital liberalization, fiscal restraint, the privatization of public services and market deregulation as major reforms. In Latin America, the costs of adjustment to the new agenda in terms of unemployment, underemployment, falling wages, rising poverty and social inequality were totally absorbed by the lower segments of the population and by women and girls in the job market and within households. Nevertheless, the assessment of the impact of trade liberalization on gender equity is inconclusive. The size and direction of changes vary according to country specific variables.

Trade is the most visible channel for the integration of national economies into world markets. Past episodes of financial crisis and the current (2009) economic crisis have shown, however, that the effects of capital market integration can be much more harmful to local economies and people than integration through trade flows.<sup>3</sup> Trade and trade liberalization are different in nature, although ‘trade liberalization’ is often used as a catchphrase to designate a growth strategy led by exports whose composition is determined by market forces.

Trade liberalization is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for trade to occur. In fact, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Brazil and South Korea, among others, promoted and expanded manufactured exports while protecting their domestic markets from import competition. On the other hand, the overall reduction of tariff and non-tariff barriers later on did not result in impressive export growth and diversification for a large number of Latin American countries.

Trade and trade policy affect men and women in their conditions as workers, producers and consumers, and affect women in particular because of their role as care providers within households and communities. Trade expansion and trade policy affect men and women differently because gender relations impinge on the individual access of men and women to productive resources and trade benefits. It should not be forgotten, however, that within gender groups, inequalities can be even greater than between groups. In other words, within male and female groups, access to economic opportunities and assets is a critical

2 Starting in the late 1940s, the debate on the distributive aspects of trade benefits was concentrated on the unequal pattern of distribution among developed and developing countries (see Bielschowsky, 1998).

3 A recent paper by Christiansen, Schindler and Tresselt (2009) found no systematic positive correlation between capital account liberalization and economic growth.

function of factors such as social class, race, ethnicity and rural-urban characteristics that lie at the origin of individual resource endowments.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to provide a succinct review of the impacts of trade expansion and trade policy on gender equity in Latin America. Based on the trade and gender literature, the paper will summarize major findings on whether and the extent to which trade and trade policy contribute to challenging and transforming gender inequalities in access to resources and opportunities. The empirical analysis will cover the process of trade liberalization as it occurred in Latin America. The paper is divided as follows. After this brief introduction, section 2 discusses various conceptual and methodological questions generated by the interdisciplinary and complex nature of assessing the gender dimension of trade shocks. Section 3 introduces empirical data on trade and trade liberalization in Latin America. In particular, the section describes recent developments within the two subregional integration schemes: the Southern Common Market (Mercosur) and the Andean Community (CAN). Section 4 reviews the empirical research on the gender implications of Latin American trade liberalization, while section 5 presents some concluding remarks and indicates areas for further research.

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<sup>4</sup> For example, it is an empirical fact that poor women work longer hours than wealthier women (World Bank, 2001).

## 2. Conceptual and Methodological Questions

The debate on the social and economic impacts of trade and trade policy contains a considerable degree of conceptual and methodological ambiguity. The theory recognizes that trade policy generates deliberate redistributive effects in terms of factor employment, since the primary objective of trade policy is to affect pre-existing conditions under which domestic and imported goods compete in domestic markets. Nevertheless, trade theory cannot deal adequately with unintended redistributive impacts in the job markets and at the micro (household) level, for which a better understanding of mediating institutions between markets and households is essential. The trade literature formulates the theoretical linkages between price movements in the goods market and price movements in factor markets. Trade policy will affect wages and the demand for skilled and unskilled labour (as well as other factors of production) indirectly through price effects in goods markets. Higher prices for exported goods as compared to import competing products should lead entrepreneurs to expand production and increase employment in these industries

The trade theory is optimistic about the employment outcome of trade liberalization. However, it is important to bear in mind that theoretical reasoning aims at a long term equilibrium horizon. Crucial assumptions on the interindustry mobility of factors of production and on factor substitution in production ensure that price changes in product markets will impact positively on labour demand and remuneration. It is only under the unrealistic assumption of full intersectoral mobility that labour leaving firms and industries whose products will be displaced by imported goods will be entering firms and industries that will expand under new price conditions with no adjustment costs.

Short-term models of foreign trade are empirically more relevant, since they assume that some factors of production are specific to individual industries that accept that their migration to other industries requires time: this is true for workers, machinery and land use. Firms will require a period of time to adapt their products and processes to the new price conditions. Intuitively, factors specific to exporting industries in expansion will share in the gains of trade, while factors specific to industries in decline will suffer (Krugman & Obstfeld, 2004).<sup>5</sup> Therefore, trade theory incorporates negative distributional results from trade liberalization, albeit during a transitional period.<sup>6</sup> In real life, however, the mismatch between qualifications in the supply side and the demand for labour can become permanent. Other assumptions are also required on labour skills and production technology for a net creation of employment to materialize. In the short run, the unskilled labour that is abundant in developing countries may be incompatible with the technology of production required by international competition, an empirical fact that is at odds with the theory of international trade. In this situation, jobs can be destroyed at a higher rate than they are created. Thus, if there is a mismatch between domestic unskilled human resources and exporting industries' demands for skilled labour, a large part of the labour supply may become redundant and the optimistic expectations of mainstream economists will not be fulfilled.

Some workers' skills may also be made redundant for reasons not taken into account by the theory. For instance, let us take two industries, clothing and steel. The former employs women intensively and the latter employs predominantly men. Let us imagine that clothing is the import competing industry and

5 Another critical assumption in trade models is that there is perfect competition in both goods and factors markets with no power relationships or strategic actions. In addition, the political economy implicit in trade models includes the presence of a benevolent and neutral state and total passivity on the part of economic agents. In real life, economic agents are not homogeneous, and the literature of collective action shows how some agents are able to evaluate the costs and benefits of trade policies, define their preferences in light of such policies, overcome problems facing collective action and seek the means to influence policy formulators (see Adserà & Boix, 2003).

6 The historic paper by Paul Samuelson (1939) provided theoretical legitimacy to the formulation of compensatory policies aimed at balancing gains and losses between capital and labour after trade liberalization.

the steel industry is the export expanding industry. In the short run, after domestic markets are opened to import competition, the clothing industry will contract, increasing female unemployment. The steel industry will expand, but since it is a capital intensive industry, jobs will not be generated at the same rate at which the industry expands. Even in the long run, unemployed women in the clothing industry will not acquire the skills to be hired by the steel industry, because social norms preclude women from being employed there. Discriminatory social norms are not taken into consideration by the trade literature.

It is in their multidimensional roles as workers or entrepreneurs, consumers, and care providers that the majority of women suffer the impact of macroeconomic policies, particularly trade policy, sometimes with conflicting results.<sup>7</sup> Cheaper consumer (or industrial) goods may benefit women as consumers (or as producers), but they may lose their jobs if the enterprise they work for becomes less competitive than its foreign competitors. Jobs lost at enterprises that cannot measure up to the new foreign competition may be compensated for by jobs created in competitive exporting enterprises.

The first studies on trade and gender were concerned with the gender impacts of trade and the internationalization of production rather than the effects of trade policy. Researchers were attracted by the consequences for gender relations of the recruitment of a vast number of women in Asian countries by export manufacturing enterprises, mostly in the textile and clothing industries, but also in electronic products (Elson & Pearson, 1989a). The contradictory implications of the employment of unskilled female labour by 'late industrialization' for patriarchal relations and gender equity opened up a fertile area of research that brought together different segments of economic studies, such as trade, labour and household economics, and forced economists to deal with complex macro–micro relations (Elson & Pearson, 1989a).<sup>8</sup>

A great number of studies show that a high proportion of the female labour force was employed in developing country export oriented manufacturing (Wood, 1995: 96). Significant employment of women in labour intensive export industries existed in South Korea, Malaysia, Mauritius, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Mexico. The results were mixed. The research shows that the changing international division of labour coexisted with 'the persisting sexual division of labour in manufacturing industry' (Elson & Pearson, 1989a: 1). Empirical research indicates that trade related employment could open up opportunities for women by challenging patriarchal relations and increasing women's income while at the same time decomposing and recomposing the existing forms of gender subordination (Pearson, 1998: 178). Although the labour conditions under which women worked are much criticized in the research, employment in export industries is found to be a better alternative to unemployment or employment in family rural production (Barrientos, Kabeer & Hossain, 2004). Similar findings appear in research on Latin American high value agricultural exports.

At the macro level, the size of female employment in exporting industries depends on country specific variables, since it is the unique nature of the international integration of each country or its trade specialization that will determine the characteristics of the demand for female labour. The correlation of manufacturing exports and female employment was due to the massive integration of Asian and a few other developing countries in international supply chains, with women performing the most labour intensive activities of these countries' production complex (mostly in textiles and clothing, toys, and

7 Trade policy also has a fiscal dimension that may affect the family unit and women through its impact on social spending and may result in an increase (or decrease) in unpaid activities by women.

8 Conceptual and methodological difficulties kept gender specific aspects of trade liberalization away from mainstream economics. Only recently have efforts been made to employ standard economic analysis on such questions (Bussolo & De Hoyos, 2009b).

electronic products).<sup>9</sup> As will be discussed below, Latin American exporting industries are not intensive employers of women, although women have also been intensively employed in the non-traditional agricultural exports of countries such as Chile, Ecuador and Colombia.

Excellent surveys of the empirical literature on trade and gender are already available, with a few of them also covering Latin America (see Thorin, 2001; 2003).<sup>10</sup> A group of hypotheses from the literature can be summarized:

1. Women are widely employed in labour intensive exporting industries that tend to provide precarious jobs with little or no social benefits (in a process known as the feminization of jobs). In this case, their welfare is directly affected by eventual job loss due to the lack of competitiveness of local exporting enterprises or by the reallocation of activities by large multinational enterprises searching for cheaper labour elsewhere.
2. Women are also widely employed in subsistence and family farm production that can be import competing. In this case, their welfare is affected by cheaper imports of agricultural products (which may be subsidised in the country of origin).<sup>11</sup>
3. The technological intensification of productive systems tends to reduce the presence of women in the job market (known as the defeminization of jobs).
4. The nature of women's integration into labour markets brought about by trade liberalization and trade expansion can potentially challenge intrafamily relations. There is impressionistic evidence that in some cases finding employment in the exporting industry has improved women's bargaining power in the household. It should not be forgotten, however, that the integration of local economies into world markets brings more insecurity to job markets.<sup>12</sup>

At the micro level, trade liberalization will be felt in the household unit, since changes in the relative prices of goods and factors will have a bearing on intrahousehold decisions on production, consumption and labour supply (Winters, 1999). The welfare of household members depends on their monetary income as much as on the prices of goods and services that make up their consumption baskets. Trade and trade policy will affect household income through their effects on the prices and quantity of goods, services and assets that household members sell in the market for money, and also consume. In most cases, labour power is the only asset household members have to sell, although family production, rents, cash transfers through public policies and remittances from household members working abroad may also make up a significant part of individual monetary income. All these components of monetary income may be affected, firstly, by trade policy and, secondly, by the derived effect of the greater integration of the domestic economy into global markets (trade dynamics). Over time, trade liberalization and economic integration may affect the nature and level of market (and non-market) activities that women perform outside (and inside) the household, their share of their households' monetary income, and the control they may exercise over their assets, thus moving gender relations towards more or less equity.

9 See Ventura-Dias (2003) for a discussion of the implications for trade theory of the new international organization of production.

10 See, for instance, Fontana (2009); Fontana, Joeke & Masikas (1998); Çagatay (2005); Grown, Elson & Çagatay (2000); Tran-Nguyen & Zampetti (2004); Tran-Nguyen (2004); Ventura-Dias (2005).

11 The North American Free Trade Agreement brought subsidised agricultural imports from the U.S. to Mexico that negatively affected Mexican domestic farms.

12 Two recent documents jointly produced by the International Labour Organization and the World Trade Organization recognize that current conditions of international trade, with the fragmentation of production and the intraindustrial specialization of tasks (activities), impart to enterprises greater power of arbitrage over prices, weakens the bargaining position of workers and leads to job insecurity (ILO & WTO, 2007; 2009).

The departure point for an economic study of gender relations is the separation of human activities into two sets in which the relative association of men and women has social and economic implications. The first set comprises productive or income generating activities that are performed in the market (the public sphere), while the second consists of unpaid activities that are performed within the household (the private sphere). The latter includes care activities that meet basic human needs such as preparing meals, cleaning, bearing children, child rearing, family caring and community work, but also subsistence production in rural communities, all of which fall under the category of the 'care economy', 'unpaid care work', 'non-market work' or 'the work of social reproduction' (Aguirre, 2005; Elson, 1999; Folbre, 1994). Men and women are differently involved in these two large sets of activities and this sexual division of labour, which is socially defined (gendered); entails asymmetric conditions for men and women to access productive assets, economic opportunities and benefits; and ultimately constrains women's mobility and their ability to act and to articulate the choices affecting their lives (Sen, 1990).

It is important to reiterate that women are not equal in terms of the restrictions they face when accessing productive resources, including human capital accumulation. Although gender relations cut across class and race groups, class and race compound gender inequity relations. Gender conflicts exist across class and other social characteristics; nonetheless, among women, the level of bargaining power is also a function of their access to assets and their level of income, which are determined by social class and race affiliation. A proper evaluation of trade effects would require the disaggregation of data on women according to income levels, rural-urban activities and race whenever possible.

A consensus has emerged in recent economic research that trade and gender as much as trade and poverty are multidimensional and complex topics. To assess gender equity effects from trade liberalization requires a better understanding of the nature, pace and scale of changes launched by trade liberalization. Macro and micro issues need to be related, and the mediation among them through markets, policies and institutions has to be elucidated (Bussolo & De Hoyos, 2009; Fontana, 2009; Giordano, 2009). Labour market institutions, property rights institutions, markets and other institutions mediate the relations between trade and the final outcomes at the household level (Bardhan, 2005; Jansen & Nordås, 2004). In this sense, the important role of domestic policies in alleviating the adjustment costs that result from trade liberalization and increasing its benefits cannot be ignored. Relevant institutions and public policies can be effective in reducing adjustment costs either by compensating the negatively affected industries, facilitating the training of displaced workers or enhancing the operation of particular markets. There has not been much research on institutions and public policies that have a bearing on attenuating (or enhancing) the negative impacts of trade liberalization on gender inequalities in access to resources and opportunities.

Although within the space of this short paper it is not possible to provide a full picture of changes brought about by trade liberalization in heterogeneous Latin American countries, the following section describes the general features of the process in broad outlines.

### 3. Trade Liberalization in Latin America: The Role of Regional Integration Schemes

From the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, Latin American countries consolidated economic reforms, which included opening trade and capital markets to foreign flows, while in Chile and Uruguay the process started even earlier. After decades of large scale state intervention in domestic economies and the intense use of industrial policy to guide industrialization programmes, the region adopted a development model based on private agents' decisions, with greater autonomy accorded to the market mechanism for resource allocation. Trade liberalization implied a deeper integration of Latin American economies into global markets for capital, goods and services, and full reliance on the export sector as an engine of growth.

Trade liberalization comprises the reduction of tariff and non-tariff barriers, which can be accomplished through unilateral domestic policy and legislation and/or through international agreements negotiated at the bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral levels. Economists believe that trade liberalization should be a unilateral decision by governments. Historically, however, opening trade to domestic competition was the outcome of reciprocal agreements negotiated between trading partners.<sup>13</sup> The 'unilateral' trade liberalization that was carried out in Latin America as part of structural adjustment programmes is explained by the context of reduced bargaining power of Latin American governments derived from the debt crisis of the 1980s.<sup>14</sup> Lowering or increasing tariffs directly influences the relative prices of domestic and imported goods, thereby affecting the composition of exports and imports.<sup>15</sup> Other instruments such as subsidies or administrative actions that imply quantitative measures (quotas) also affect the relative prices of domestic and foreign goods.<sup>16</sup>

It was not just a coincidence that the process of unilateral trade liberalization in the region, together with the deepening of multilateral trading rules, took place along with a new wave of regionalism. This new regionalism, epitomized by the legal framework of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA),<sup>17</sup> challenged traditional views of regional integration on two basic grounds. Firstly, NAFTA imposes the same obligations on governments irrespective of their countries' level of economic and social development.<sup>18</sup> NAFTA includes two industrialized countries (the U.S. and Canada) and one developing country (Mexico), which abdicated the right to differentiated and preferential treatment.<sup>19</sup> Secondly, NAFTA includes the liberalization of trade in goods and services (but not the movement of people), as well as rules on investment and intellectual property rights, but it does not intend to be anything more

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13 As Krugman (1997) ironically puts it, governments seem to be willing to do themselves some good only if other governments do the same.

14 Nonetheless, empirical studies have showed that greater pragmatism prevailed in the way trade liberalization was carried out than that implied by the trade reform literature. See the studies in Lengyel and Ventura-Dias (2004) that show evidence of this assertion.

15 The discussion on trade and gender in this paper refers only to trade in merchandise. In general, trade in services is affected by different trade policy instruments, as will be pointed out in section 4.

16 Trade policy includes trade liberalization objectives, but it can also be formulated to promote and diversify domestic exports.

17 NAFTA was negotiated in the early 1990s and entered into force in 1 January 1994.

18 Until the creation of NAFTA, there were only two types of regional schemes: the European model among countries of similar levels of development and regional arrangements among developing countries.

19 The principle of differential and special treatment was introduced by developing countries in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in the early 1950s and it remained an important negotiating principle for such countries.



than a free trade area.<sup>20</sup> During the Clinton administration, the extension of NAFTA-like rules to the whole Western Hemisphere was envisaged through the creation of a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).<sup>21</sup> Later, NAFTA-plus trade agreements were promoted by the Bush administration at the bilateral level as a means to press for rapid results at the FTAA negotiations.

At the multilateral level, the creation of the WTO (World Trade Organization) to administer the agreements derived from the Uruguay Round expanded the reach of trade policy to include any trade related measure that might inhibit competition in domestic markets by foreign enterprises. Movements of goods, services, capital and knowledge assets were regulated as complementary forms through which enterprises may compete in a market. All Latin American countries are WTO members.

From a Latin American perspective, the new wave of regionalism also signalled the intention by governments to retain control over the pace and the extension of trade liberalization. In South America, Mercosur was formally created through the Asuncion Treaty signed in March 1991 by the presidents of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. Later, Chile and Bolivia became associate members.<sup>22</sup> CAN is much older. This integration scheme started in 1969 as the Andean Pact or the Andean Group, when five Andean countries — Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru — signed the Cartagena Agreement. In February 1973 Venezuela decided to join the Andean Group, while Chile left it in 1976. In the early 1990s, the Andean governments decided to revive the regional integration scheme and created CAN.<sup>23</sup> Disagreements about the nature of trade agreements that were negotiated by Colombia and Peru with the U.S. led Venezuela to resign its CAN membership in order to acquire full membership of Mercosur.<sup>24</sup> In April 2006 Venezuela quit CAN and in September of the same year Chile was admitted as an associate member of Mercosur.

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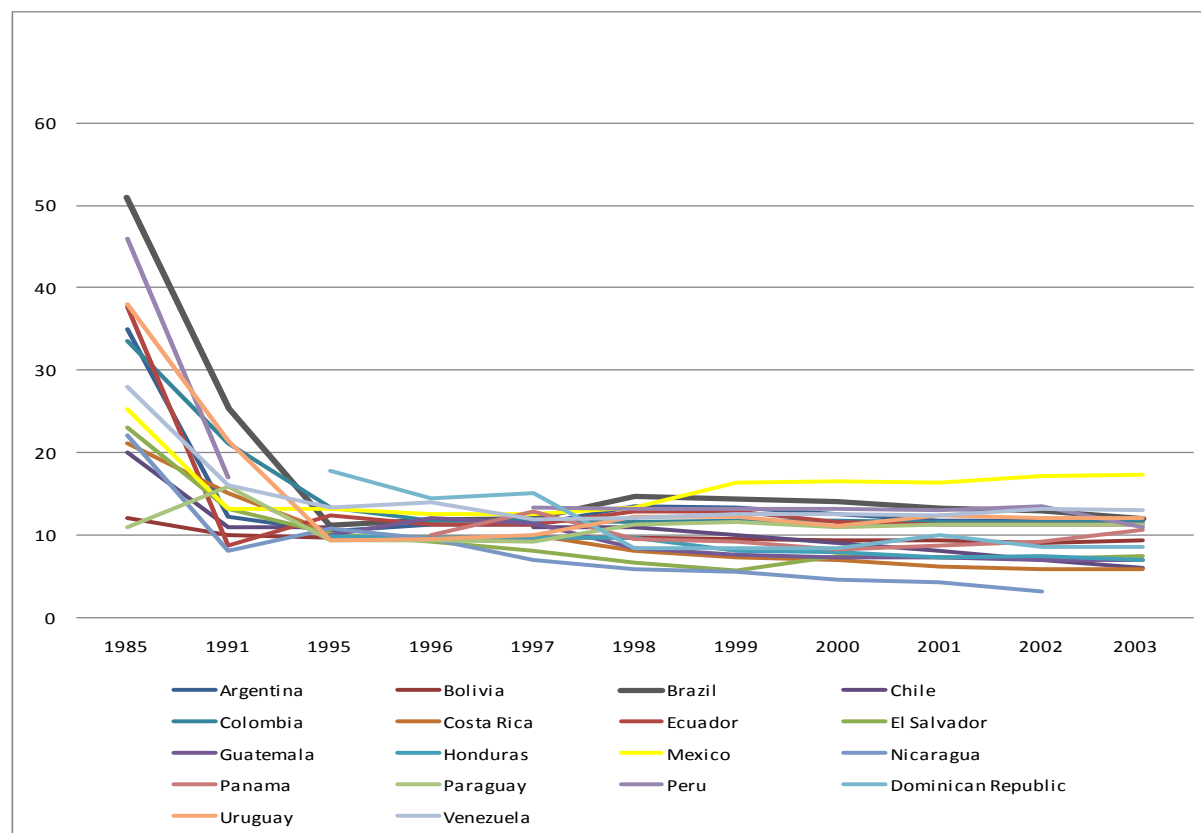
20 For many decades, Jacob Viner's terminology, which distinguished among free trade areas, customs unions and common markets, constituted the conventional wisdom in regional integration. The creation of free trade areas was the first step in regional integration, but it included basically the free movement of goods. A customs union implied the adoption of a common tariff by the countries belonging to the regional scheme, in a further step towards a common trade policy. Finally, a common market would establish the three freedoms: the free movement of goods, services and capital. The fourth freedom, that of the free movement of people, as well as the complete freedom of capital movement, would require deeper commitments, leading to the creation of an internal market and eventually of a political union (Viner, 1950).

21 Mercosur has negotiated as a bloc with third countries. Negotiations with both the U.S. and the EU are currently stalled. The centre of the difficulties resides in agricultural liberalization that cannot be accomplished at the regional or bilateral level. The same disagreements with the same partners that have prevented the multilateral Doha Round of negotiations from proceeding have locked negotiations among Mercosur, the EU and the U.S. (see SELA, 2007). Negotiations for an FTAA remain blocked after ten years of intense activity at the bargaining table. For different reasons, negotiations between the Andean countries and the EU have also reached a point of stalemate.

22 See the official Mercosur website for further historical and economic information, <<http://www.mercosur.org.uy>>.

23 See the official CAN website for further information, <<http://www.comunidadandina.org>>.

24 Venezuela's full membership has still to be ratified by the Paraguayan parliament.

**Figure 1: Reduction of applied tariffs in Latin America, 1985–2003 (percent)**

Source: World Bank, <<http://www.worldbank.org>>, based on WTO, Inter-American Development Bank and UN Conference on Trade and Development data

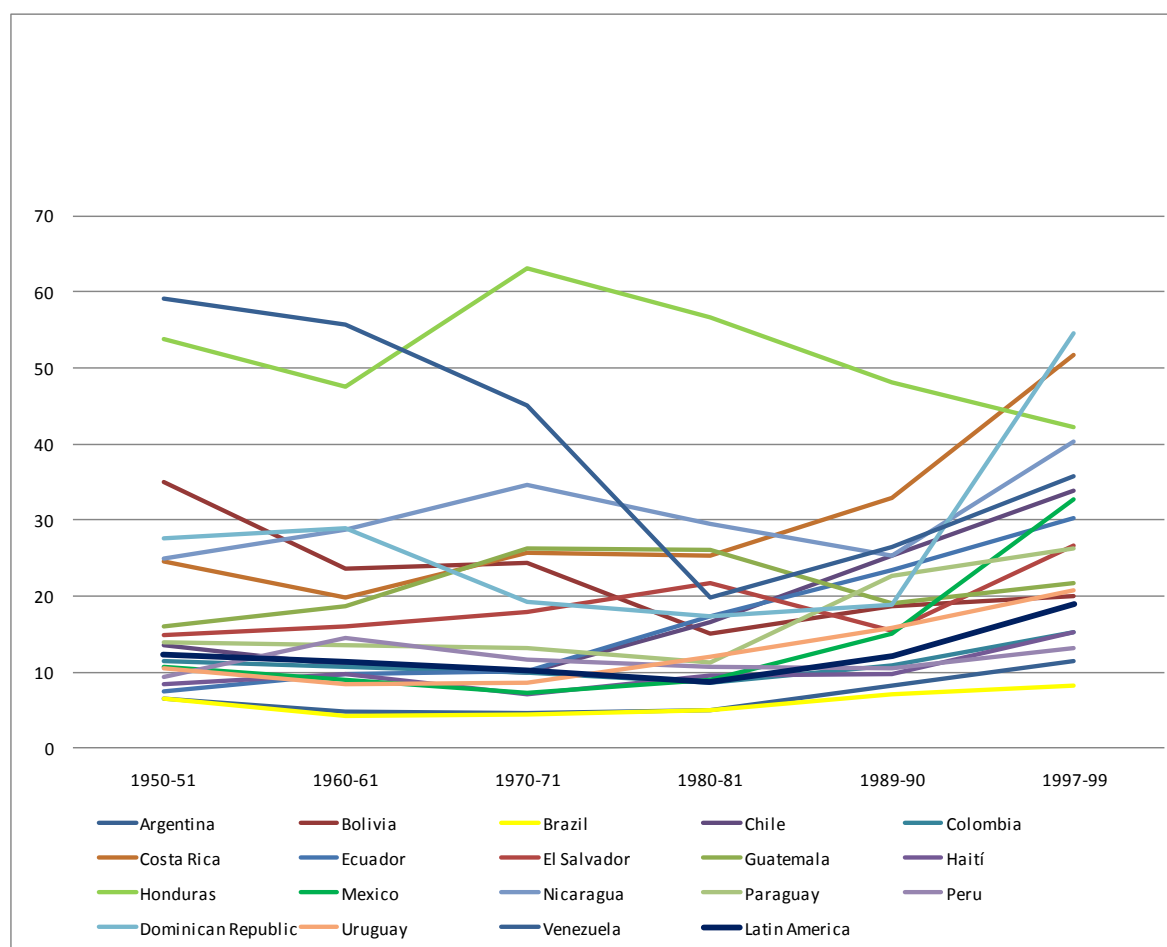
Both Mercosur and the CAN intended to rapidly achieve the status of a customs union, i.e. of a free trade area for goods with a common external tariff for merchandise originating in countries not belonging to the regional schemes. To accomplish the first objective of creating a free trade area, the Asuncion Treaty had a built-in provision aiming at a gradual, automatic and general reduction of import duties over a short period of time. The timetable for tariff reductions required a cut of 7 percent every six months after an initial reduction of 47 percent, which led to duty free internal Mercosur trade by the end of 1994 (Baumann, 2001).

Governments of Mercosur countries, in particular Brazil (as the largest and most diversified economy), have designed Mercosur as an intergovernmental entity with a minimum of formal institutions to carry out the coordination and harmonization of common norms. On the other hand, from the very beginning CAN based its functioning on broad institutional machinery that included the Andean Court of Justice, the Andean Development Corporation, the Latin American Reserve Fund and the Andean Parliament. Both integration schemes are experiencing problems in converting regional norms into domestic law and in implementing agreed communitarian decisions (SELA, 2007).<sup>25</sup>

At a different pace, customs duties were reduced and trade-restraining administrative measures were eliminated. As can be seen in Figure 1, between 1991 and 1995 there was a strong convergence of tariff levels in the whole of Latin America towards an average applied tariff of 11 percent, although in some countries, particularly the smaller economies, tariff levels were closer to 6 percent.

25 See, for instance, the decision to double tariffs between land-locked Paraguay and the other members.

Figure 2: Exports' share of GDP\* in Latin American countries, 1950-99 (percent)



GDP = gross domestic product.

Source: IMF (International Monetary Fund), <<http://www.imf.org>>

It is ironic that civil society has tended to be more sympathetic towards Mercosur than to the WTO, while the way tariff reduction was imposed on Mercosur member countries was more devastating to their economies and employment than WTO rules. In terms of a strict tariff reduction comparison, multilateral commitments were less stringent than regional obligations. At the WTO, negotiations permitted a large difference between the level of applied tariffs of Latin American countries (less than 11 percent) and that of bound tariffs (35 percent). In contrast, Mercosur commitments had a strict timetable for making more than 80 percent of internal trade duty free.<sup>26</sup> For instance, Brazilian domestic wheat production, which was mostly produced in the south of Brazil in family owned farms, was wiped out overnight, since it could not compete with low cost wheat from Argentina. As mentioned above, all four countries were committed to an initial reduction of 47 percent of tariff levels (Lavinás & Magina, 1994). Brazilian negotiators did not negotiate for a longer adjustment time for wheat producers as the Chilean government did during Chile's Mercosur negotiations (Chilean negotiators protected the wheat sector for 17 years before opening the market).

<sup>26</sup> See Lengyel and Ventura-Dias (2004) for a set of studies on the period and a detailed bibliography.

As a result of the overall trade liberalization process, the share of exports in total economic activities as measured by GDP increased, although at different rates for individual countries. As indicated in Figure 2, at the end of the 1990s, countries such as Argentina and Brazil were only moderately dependent on exports as a source of growth, with the share of exports in GDP below 10 percent, whereas Chile, Mexico and the Dominican Republic, among others, relied on exports for more than 35 percent their GDP. But if we look at the bottom of Figure 2, even countries more reliant on internal markets show an increasing share of exports in GDP.

South America is strongly specialized in mineral and agricultural commodities, both processed and unprocessed. This trade specialization contrasts with that of Mexico and Central America, which have specialized in import intensive exports (maquilas) directed to the U.S. Some Mercosur members (Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay) are among the most efficient world producers and exporters of grains, meat and poultry. Venezuela, Peru, Bolivia, Colombia and Ecuador, which until 2006 made up CAN, are endowed with abundant mineral resources, including oil, and have experienced difficulties in diversifying the composition of their exports.<sup>27</sup>

The share of manufacturing exports in South American exports is very low. Using WTO data, in four countries, manufactures account for less than 10 percent of exports: Venezuela (6 percent), Bolivia (7 percent), Ecuador (8 percent) and Chile (10 percent).<sup>28</sup> In Peru (12 percent) and Paraguay (14 percent), manufactures account for less than 15 percent of exports. In Argentina and Uruguay, manufactures account for roughly 30 percent of exports, whereas in Colombia (39 percent) and Brazil (47 percent), the manufacturing share of exports is more impressive, but far from Asian and industrial countries' share.<sup>29</sup> As indicated in Table 1, manufactures account for averages greater than 70 percent of exports for those regions. Moreover, setting aside Brazilian aircraft exports, most of the manufactured products that are exported by South American countries are natural resource intensive, but not necessarily labour intensive.

Clearly, Latin America is a heterogeneous set of economies at various levels of economic and institutional development. The majority of these economies have not succeeded in diversifying their productive structure towards internationally competitive manufacturing industries and have remained commodity exporters subject to the vagaries of international commodity prices. While all commodity exporters are affected by this structural external vulnerability, there are great differences among the effects of the agricultural and mineral industries on the development process, particularly in terms of generating backward and forward linkages with the rest of the economy and providing decent jobs. Historically, mineral production and exports tend to create enclaves with little spillover to other sectors of the economy, unless there is a deliberate effort by the state to promote linkages.<sup>30</sup>

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27 In 2006 Venezuela quit CAN to join Mercosur.

28 WTO classification does not include low levels of mineral processing as manufactures. Chile is a significant exporter of copper products.

29 WTO (2008b).

30 See the classic article by Baldwin (1963) on the impact of the production function of different primary products on the economic performance of exporting countries. Modern references include De Ferranti et al. (2002) and Hausman, Hwang and Rodrik (2005). In terms of agricultural exports, tea, coffee and banana plantations were also exporting enclaves. See Beckford (1972).

**Table 1: Share of manufactures in total merchandise exports and imports of different regions, 2007 (percent)**

	Exports	Imports
World	69.8	69.8
North America	72.2	72.8
<b>South and Central America</b>	<b>30.9</b>	<b>69.1</b>
Europe	78.6	72.1
Commonwealth of Independent States	25.1	76.7
Africa	18.8	68.0
Middle East	21.0	75.7
Asia	81.6	63.7

Source: WTO (2008a: Table II.06)

Problems derived from the composition of exports, particularly in Andean countries, preceded the adoption of the liberalization agenda. Conversely, there is no empirical evidence that trade liberalization as such promoted export expansion and economic growth. The exception of Chile is explained by the active involvement of public policies and public institutions in export promotion and diversification (CEPAL, 1990). There was a short period of high commodity prices during the years 1994–97 that ended with the Asian financial crisis. It was only after 2003, with a new cycle of profitable international commodity prices, that Latin American exports increased at rates higher than the world average (CEPAL, 2008a). Sooner than expected, however, the growth cycle was aborted by the financial crisis of 2007, which changed into a global recession in 2008 (SELA, 2009).

During the 1990s, all Latin American economies were fully integrated into world markets, but liberalization and integration did not foster sustained economic growth. As Berry (2006: ii) emphasizes, competing studies on the growth impact of trade liberalization and integration tell different stories, and ‘none are fully persuasive due to a wide range of methodological flaws and obstacles’. The empirical evidence shows that the rate of growth in the 1990s was low and unstable. The uncertainties surrounding a stop-and-go type of growth did not encourage entrepreneurs to invest, innovate and create jobs. Income and job instability also increased during the period (CEPAL, 2004; 2008b).

Regional integration schemes have no mechanisms to counteract contracting trends in international markets, and intraregional trade in Latin America is characteristically procyclical, tending to grow when individual economies are already growing and to contract further when economic activity reduces. The years 1995–97 were the ‘golden era’ for intraregional trade. In 1997 trade within Mercosur accounted for almost 25 percent of the total trade of member countries. After that, the proportion of intra-Mercosur trade in total Mercosur trade was reduced to less than 12 percent in 2003 and has stayed roughly at 14.5 percent in recent years. Similarly, because oil prices were depressed in the 1990s, in 1998 intraregional trade accounted for almost 14 percent of total CAN exports. Thereafter, intra-CAN trade never went beyond 7 percent of total CAN trade.

Both Mercosur and CAN have been under considerable stress over the past decade. Colombia and Peru signed and ratified free trade agreements (FTAs) with the U.S., ignoring the critiques of the Venezuelan government and part of their own populations.<sup>31</sup> After 18 years, most of the trade shocks resulting from Mercosur's creation as an FTA should have been absorbed by individual economies. Nevertheless, strong asymmetries in terms of industrial, institutional and entrepreneurial development have led to frictions between Brazil and Argentina in particular that were added to others that existed between Argentina and Uruguay.<sup>32</sup>

Gender concerns are included and institutionalized at different levels in the Mercosur and CAN machinery. In July 1998, Mercosur institutionalized the Specialized Meeting of Women (Reunión Especializada de la Mujer del Mercosur).<sup>33</sup> In CAN, the Coordination of Andean Women Workers (Coordinadora de Mujeres Trabajadoras Andinas) is a member of the Consejo Consultivo Laboral Andino, which is a CAN consulting body. The purpose of these bodies is to analyze the legislation in individual country members and associates relative to the concept of equity of opportunities between men and women.

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31 Only the Peruvian FTA was ratified by the U.S. Congress, while the Colombian FTA is pending a final decision by the U.S.

32 In the wake of the recent (2008/09) global crisis, Argentina implemented a series of non-tariff measures aimed at protecting its enterprises and domestic employment from the competition of Brazilian products.

33 See <<http://www.mercosurmujeres.org/>>.

## 4. Trade and Trade Policy Impacts on Gender Equity in Latin America

A rigorous assessment of trade and trade policy impacts on gender equity is hampered, firstly, by the lack of disaggregated data on male and female rural and urban activities. Secondly, when data is available, there are no time series to permit the quantifying of changes in women's situation over time. Historical data is necessary to measure changes over time in the relative ability of men and women to 'seize opportunities opened up by liberalization policies and to cope with the risks and fall-outs of those same policies' (Razavi, 2009a: 7). In addition, it is important to keep in mind that the opening up of domestic markets to import competition in Latin America took place along with other components of the liberalization agenda (fiscal discipline, a tight monetary policy, market deregulation, the privatization of public assets and anti-inflationary macroeconomic policy). Because of the interactions among these policies, inherent problems exist in any attempt to single out the effects on gender equity of each separate policy, as in the case of trade policy.

Gender inequality has many dimensions that stem from women's dual role in paid and unpaid activities performed in the market and non-market spheres of social life. Empirical research on gender and trade in Latin America has predominantly focused on the nature of job opportunities and labour income brought about by trade expansion, with a secondary focus on the impact on the intrahousehold allocation and distribution of resources. Both a lack of data and methodological problems explain the lack of empirical research on the size of female labour reallocation in import competing industries as the direct result of trade liberalization.

There are intrinsic data problems in quantifying changes caused by the liberalization agenda in the care sphere. Time use surveys provide information on the allocation of time by individual members of a household among different specified activities. It is a valuable source of data on who does what in caring for family members and household maintenance, in spite of all the limitations. However, there are great disparities in the scope and purpose of the various surveys, and most datasets do not distinguish between the leisure time of a family member and the time each family member spends on household maintenance, management and caring for other family members (Apps, 2002; Budlender, 2007). Moreover, only a small group of Latin American countries, and then only recently, have included systematic data collection on time use in household surveys.<sup>34</sup> The literature relies on case studies that combine quantitative and qualitative methods.

Empirical studies of the gender impacts of trade liberalization in Latin American countries can be roughly divided into four groups. The first group comprises studies focused on the size and characteristics of female employment generated by non-traditional agro-export industries. The second concentrates on the impacts of trade liberalization on female participation in urban labour markets. The third group focuses on the informal urban sector, while another important field of research addresses the impact of the liberal agenda on female smallholder or peasant production, a phenomenon associated with an increase in the share of female headed rural households (Deere, 2009). The major findings of these four sets of studies will be briefly reviewed below.

Women have been extensively employed as agricultural wage workers in the production and packing of non-traditional export crops such as fresh fruits and vegetables in Chile, and cut flowers in Colombia and Ecuador (Barrientos, 1999; Deere, 2009; Jaramillo & Romero, 2009; Jarviz & Vera-Toscano, 2004;

<sup>34</sup> The Latin America countries of Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Mexico, among others, have introduced a time use module in their annual household surveys (see Aguirre, 2005; Esquivel, 2006).

Newman, 2002). Because this employment is temporary and seasonal, it is difficult to determine its size in national censuses and household surveys. Deere (2009: Table 4.4) uses indirect information on rural employment to derive the size of female employment in non-traditional agricultural exports. For instance, in 2002, household surveys indicated that 75 percent of rural women in Chile were employed in non-agricultural activities, as compared to 58.5 percent of rural men, although non-agricultural activities make up a heterogeneous set also comprising non-export related activities (see Köbrich & Dirven, 2007). Estimations for rural women employed in non-agricultural activities vary between 60 and 80 percent female employment in cut flower production in Colombia and between 50 and 60 percent in Ecuador (Dolan & Sorby, 2003: Table 3.3).

Export expansion through the cultivation of new agricultural products has provided jobs for women who have never had access to monetized earnings before. Data on female rural occupations shows that the majority of women in agriculture still work on farms as unpaid family workers (Ballara & Parada, 2009). The literature shows that a woman's bargaining power and autonomy within the household depends on her ability to generate income and gain access to assets. The new source of income can enhance female bargaining power in intrahousehold resource distribution and disrupt patriarchal power relations. Detailed case studies, such as that by Newman (2002), have found circumstantial empirical evidence that female employment in export activities has improved gender equality. Newman (2002) documents a greater participation of men in household maintenance tasks as a positive consequence of women being employed in the cut flower industry in Ecuador. Similarly, Madrid (2006) and Madrid and Lowell (2007) investigate the impact of the cut flower industry on Colombian female workers. In direct interviews, these workers emphasized the benefits they had derived from formal employment such as gaining status in the household and achieving relative economic independence. On the other hand, female workers complained of cut flower related health hazards, lack of autonomy at the plant and job instability, among other things.<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, Colombian female cut flower workers stressed that although the circumstances that had brought them to work included family crises and other difficulties, they did not regret moving away from their rural past. Similarly, modern fruit export development in Chile has led to increasing demand for female labour, although usually only as temporary workers and often at a piece rate. There are indications that these new opportunities have positively affected women and impacted the intrahousehold decision making process (Jarvis & Vera-Toscano, 2004).

Dolan and Sorby (2003) document high female participation in the cut flower, fresh fruit and vegetable industries, and, to a lesser extent, the poultry industry.<sup>36</sup> Like other researchers, they also raise the question of whether lower pay and poorer working conditions are part of women's competitive strength (in a process known as the feminization of labour conditions). The studies propose several layers of analysis in order to understand the gender impacts of growth in those industries. Firstly, the characteristics of the workforce should be analyzed in order to identify and understand the factors driving the demographic profile of the industries. Secondly, the nature of employment generated in high value agriculture and opportunities for career mobility should be fully grasped. Finally, the social norms and intrahousehold issues that govern the gains women are likely to realize through labour force participation should be investigated. A sizeable body of literature shows that the skills demanded by these high value agricultural exporting industries are socially constructed perceptions of 'feminine' skills (e.g. obedience,

35 According to Madrid (2006: 3–4), female tasks in the cut flower industry include 'planting, disbudding the side buds of the plant, knitting to make the baskets that guide the direction that the flower plant grows, weeding, cutting the flowers, cultivation, mulching, pruning and the placing of rubber bands around the buds to keep them from opening overnight and then in the morning to remove the rubber bands, among others'. Because of intensive chemical use in the industry, there have been reports of work related health problems, ranging from 'headaches, nausea and conjunctivitis to miscarriages, congenital malformations and neurological problems'.

36 Most of those high value agricultural commodities are part of global commodity chains driven by giant corporations from industrial countries.



care, manual dexterity and diligence) that are deeply rooted in traditional female roles (see the following paragraph).<sup>37</sup>

Two major hypotheses generated by the literature on trade and gender in manufacturing exports are also valid for high value agricultural exports. The first concerns the nature of female jobs generated by the expansion of exports, known as the ‘feminization of exporting jobs’ due to the working conditions of export processing operations. The basic hypothesis is that labour intensive exporting industries demand ‘feminine’ skills that include obedience, manual dexterity, patience, acceptance of hierarchy and lack of labour militancy. Women are sought because they are likely to accept working conditions unacceptable to men (the lack of job security and work related benefits). The second — related — hypothesis refers to the ‘glass ceiling’ represented by the effects of the technological upgrading of export operations on female manufacturing jobs. Women are hired for unskilled ‘feminine’ jobs (sewing in textile operations, for instance) and are replaced by men when technological upgrading is introduced. Both hypotheses are validated in the cases of Latin American high value agricultural exports (with the caveat of insufficient data being available for the drawing of rigorous conclusions).

In urban labour markets, data from household surveys shows that over the past two decades in all Latin American countries there is a general expansion of female activity rates in all groups of women differentiated by age, income and years of schooling, although a high average of more than 70 per cent is reached for the cohort of young women aged 25–49 years. Similarly, there is a high correlation between rates of female labour participation and years of schooling.<sup>38</sup> Available empirical evidence shows that, after trade liberalization, labour markets were not functioning properly and there was an unexpected mismatch between the skills that women (and men) could supply and those demanded by the market. Consequently, unemployment hit the female working age population harder when compared with the male population. High female unemployment rates must be added to underemployment data, since quite often women find jobs in less productive sectors such as personal and domestic services. On the positive side, women have increased their stock of human capital and there has been a general reduction in the male–female wage gap, although this decline does not always correlate positively with the number of schooling years. Conversely, empirical data shows that the male–female wage gap is higher in subgroups with more education (Ventura-Dias, 2009).

Several studies document that women experience hiring, firing and reallocation from one job to another more often than men. For instance, a study of Chile covering a period of rapid adjustment, including trade liberalization, showed that firms tend to lay off a slightly higher proportion of female workers when business contracts and to hire more women when business recovers (Levinsohn, 1999, cited in Elbeshbishi, 2009: 11).

There is some evidence that in the 1990s the greater integration of Latin American economies into global markets generated a labour demand bias favouring more educated workers, which tended to aggravate previous labour market segmentation (Weller, 2001). The demand for skilled labour in open economies endowed with abundant unskilled labour is a result that is at odds with trade theory, as discussed above. A large body of literature has tried to shed light on the relative roles of technological change and trade to explain the counterintuitive results of greater demand for skilled labour in open economies with abundant unskilled labour. Although not concerned with gender dimensions, the literature should also be considered for a fuller understanding of the impact of trade related variables and technological upgrading on the creation of opportunities for unskilled female labour after trade liberalization. For instance, in the case of Brazil, empirical analysis of the relative impact of international

37 See the vast bibliography on the subject of high value agricultural exports reviewed by Dolan and Sorby (2003).

38 Chile and Peru present the lowest activity rates, while Uruguay presents the highest.

trade and technological changes on the nature of the jobs created indicates that technological change could be directly responsible for the demand for skilled jobs, and that the adoption of production technologies that require skilled labour was induced by the greater exposure of enterprises to trade competition as the result of trade liberalisation. On the basis of the empirical evidence, therefore, the possibility is not excluded that trade liberalization (in the circumstances in which it occurred in Brazil) has had a negative impact on less qualified and less educated workers.<sup>39</sup>

Using aggregated data, after analyzing female employment in the four countries of Mercosur (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay), Azar (2004) concludes that trade liberalization did not improve the quality of female employment. She indicates that while job losses in local industries that could not compete with cheaper imports in domestic markets affected both men and women, more women lost their jobs than by men and women were less likely to find new employment in tradable industries than men. Similarly, a broad study of the impact of trade on gender inequalities that covered six Latin American countries<sup>40</sup> concludes that a small proportion of women were employed in trade related industries both in import competing and exporting industries. Nevertheless, women accounted for more than a quarter of employment in exporting industries in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. In Chile, due to the significant size of the copper industry, in which employment is predominantly male, women accounted for less than 22 percent of all employment generated by exports (Salvador, 2007; Azar, Espino & Salvador, 2009).

The lower employment of women in trade related industries in Mercosur is a corollary of high female employment in non-tradeable services, which are well known for their heterogeneity in terms of the size of enterprises, the nature of activities, and the level of organization and management at the firm level. In South America in 2006, with the exception of Paraguay (69 percent) and Peru (59 percent), in all the other countries, service sectors accounted for more than 72 percent of female urban employment (CEPAL, 2008c: Table 1.2.7).

Much has been written about the disappointing results of job creation in Latin America in the 1990s, although authors disagree on the relative roles of markets and the rigidities of labour policies in explaining these results.<sup>41</sup> Even after the region recovered from the stagnation of the 1980s, growth rates below 3 percent did not result in a major fall in unemployment, which remained fairly high throughout the 1990s (Berry, 2006). It is undeniable that Latin American reforms affected both men and women selling their labour services in the market, but the compiled empirical data shows that women were more affected than men both in terms of relative unemployment rates and underemployment, although with variations in individual countries. Further detailed information on the demand side of the labour market is required to examine different hypotheses on gender bias in job creation for men and women in the region.

Studies by the ILO (International Labour Organization) suggest that very few jobs were created in the formal sector after the market liberalization process took place in Latin America. Conversely, according to ILO data, in the 1990s eight out of ten new jobs in Latin America were created in the informal sector. The informal sector is defined as the sector of the economy that does not comply with labour market legislation (and other fiscal obligations) and consequently does not provide worker social benefits. The size of the informal sector is significant in the majority of Latin American countries, although various

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39 See Ventura-Dias (2007) for a review of the literature on the impact of trade on Brazilian job markets.

40 Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Uruguay.

41 See Weller (2001). Bourguignon (2005: 13) indicates that the literature on the costs of labour market policies is inconclusive: it is not clear that labour market regulations reduce employment or increase unemployment.

forms of self-employment are to be found in the informal economy, as well as informal wage work (Razavi, 2009b).

There is strong and robust evidence linking urban poverty with unemployment, underemployment in the informal sector and wages below the minimum wage standard (Goldberg & Pavcnik, 2004a). Goldberg and Pavcnik (2004b), using urban data from Colombia and Brazil, find no robust evidence that trade liberalization was responsible for those conditions. However, after a careful review of empirical studies on the impact of trade liberalization in developing countries, the same authors concede that the evidence produced by trade economists indicated that trade liberalization could contribute to social inequality by increasing the probability of people working in the informal sector (Goldberg & Pavcnik, 2007). These authors recommend a further examination of the interactions among labour market institutions, trade reform and informality. The underlying assumption is that rigidities in labour market institutions rather than trade liberalization could explain underemployment.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, there is an important field of research encompassing the impact of trade liberalization on gender relations in agricultural production.<sup>43</sup> Related studies document two complementary aggregate trends in rural Latin America. The increase in women's participation in the rural labour market as agricultural wage workers that was referred to above has coexisted with the growing importance of women in agricultural production. Available evidence is stronger for some countries than others, depending on a particular country's production structures, the nature of agricultural policies (before and after the reforms) and the characteristics of the country's international integration. Women have always played an important role in food production on family farms as unpaid family 'helpers', but the disruption in male and female activities caused by liberalization policies has increased the number of female headed rural households and female agricultural producers. In 2007 there were 37 million rural women older than 15 years of age in Latin America, and rural workers accounted for 46 percent of the total rural female population, 12 percent were agricultural producers, while the remaining 42 percent were unpaid family workers (Ballara & Parada, 2009: 27).

The withdrawal of the state from rural service provision accentuated discrepancies among regions, producers, and products favouring commercial crops, large farms and dynamic regions. Agricultural market liberalization led to the elimination of distribution and commercialization channels that served the small producers, which could not be replaced by market driven institutions. Therefore, in many cases, market failures in terms of distribution and commercialization prevented the transmission of price changes to producers on small farms. Winters (1999) draws attention to the need to identify distribution channels and institutions (markets, price policies, commercialization arrangements, etc.) in order to effectively integrate all producers into the benefits of the new incentive system.

Because female workers tend to be concentrated in the production of specific crops, some estimation of the impact of trade shocks is possible. Parada and Morales (2006) estimate the effects of the creation of a free trade area between Ecuador and the U.S. on women's production based on a simple model of forecasting trade effects on selected crops predominantly produced by Ecuadorian women. In Ecuador, female agricultural producers accounted for a little over a quarter of all agricultural productive units, 63 percent of which were classified as subsistence units. The study concludes that while rural households as consumers could benefit from cheaper food products imported from the U.S., dramatic results could be

42 Goldberg and Pavcnik (2007: 29–30) also point out that analysis of the impact of trade liberalization on transitional unemployment was hampered by conceptual and empirical factors. On the conceptual side, mainstream models of international trade assume full employment, and on the empirical side, there is no available disaggregated data.

43 Deere (2009) defines 'economic restructuring' in terms of the changes in Latin American agricultural production induced by the combined effect of economic crises, neoliberal policies and globalization.

expected on the production side. Additional policies were required to strengthen the technical capacity of female headed agricultural units.

This brief review of the empirical literature on trade and gender in Latin America has attempted to offer a glimpse into a rich literature that gives greater visibility to the gendered effects of macroeconomic policies.

## 5. Concluding Remarks and Areas for Further Study

Trade liberalization can be seen as a process of economic transformation that starts when a nation decides to reduce the level of protection in its domestic markets, thereby allowing for the greater autonomy of international prices in defining the trade specialization of the economy. Although trade theory perceives trade liberalization as a specific, all-embracing event that occurs at the moment when tariffs are reduced and non-tariff measures eliminated, in reality a more complex process of adjustment takes place over time. In many cases, exchange rates and monetary policy can have a more profound impact on domestic prices than a reduction in tariff levels. For instance, although tariffs were reduced and administrative measures were eliminated at the stroke of a pen in Brazil in 1990–91, the impact on relative prices of imported and domestic goods was not felt until 1994. In that year, a successful programme of price stabilization introduced a new currency (the real), and the country adopted a policy of pegging the local currency to the dollar that overvalued the local currency in dollar terms (Motta-Veiga & Ventura-Dias, 2004). Similarly, in more recent years, although the level of tariff protection in Brazil has been unchanged since 1995 and the country adopted a floating exchange rate, the depreciation of the U.S. dollar in real terms has reduced the international competitiveness of Brazilian exports and made imported goods artificially cheaper.

During the period of trade liberalization, markets and public policies affected gender inequalities in terms of access to resources and opportunities, although the net results are not clear. To what extent have the policies implemented during the 1980s and 1990s exacerbated or reduced gender inequality? To give a precise and comprehensive answer to this question is nearly impossible. Moreover, liberal policies reached their zenith in the late 1990s, after a series of financial crises made manifest the external vulnerability of Latin America. Simultaneously, however, other public policies were formulated to reduce social and gender inequities. The result is that at the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Latin American women in general are experiencing better social opportunities in accessing the ‘constituents of development’ (education, health, legal and civil rights, decent jobs, and political participation) than at any time previously. Concrete improvements in women’s lives can be measured by reductions in fertility and mortality rates, longer life expectancy, incentives for girls to attend primary and secondary schools, greater participation in political life, and increased political representation (CEPAL, 2007a; 2007b).

After many decades of a lonely debate among feminist researchers, standard economic analysis has accepted that gender inequality can hamper the diffusion of trade gains (Bussolo & De Hoyos, 2009). Men and women differ in their access to assets, human capital, labour markets and labour earnings, because social norms assign different roles to men and women within households. Gender aspects of the distributional effects of trade involve both macro variables at the level of labour markets and micro variables at the household level. The reconciliation of these two levels requires a great deal of methodological creativity because of the importance of country specific factors, such as the merchandise composition of exports and the demand for female unskilled labour, among others. In addition, researchers have to cope with the paucity and poor quality of empirical data.

Although this short essay could only provide a few insights into the empirical literature on trade and gender in Latin America, a preliminary conclusion is that there is still a lot to be done. There have been various econometric studies on the labour market and wage earnings, and detailed case studies covering agricultural export industries. Field studies have included qualitative information on the impact of employment and income on the intrahousehold allocation of time and power. Several dimensions of trade are still unexplored, however. For instance, very little work has been done on the price effects of deeper integration into world markets on the consumption side.<sup>44</sup>

44 See Bussolo and De Hoyos (2009b) for some studies on Africa.

Two broad issues related to trade and trade policy remain relatively under-researched. Firstly, there are questions related to the impact of male and female migration on gender relations. Women have been migrating to the U.S. and Europe to look for housework and child care work in high income families in what has been called ‘the globalization of care services’, while girls and older women back home take on their duties (Durano, 2007; Herrera, 2005). In Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and other Latin American countries, women stay behind and care for the family, while male family members emigrate, leading to a high proportion of female heads of households on peasant farms. Although some research has been done on migrants’ remittances, the impact of migration on gender relations is an area that requires further research. Similarly, services are a crucial component of women’s welfare. On the one hand, state delivered and market delivered services replace care services provided by women in the household, while on the other hand, the care sector is the major employer of women everywhere, including Latin America. The implications of international obligations derived from WTO agreements for the liberalization of trade in services, particularly education and health services, have generated several studies (e.g. Salvador, 2003), but the field remains basically unexplored.

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