



# **Beijing Against The WTO**

## **The Midwife's Ring**

*Nelcia Robinson*

## **ABOUT US**

The Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA) is a regional network of feminist, individual researchers, activists and women's organizations, which define feminist politics as a matter of both consciousness and action.

CAFRA is committed to understanding the relationship between the oppression of women and other forms of oppression in the society, and to working actively for change.

Women in Development Europe (WIDE) is a trans-national network of gender specialist, women active in non-governmental organization and human rights activists. WIDE aims to articulate the relevance of the principles of gender equality and justice to the development process through research, documentation, information dissemination, capacity building, advocacy and networking.

The Caribbean Gender and Trade Network (CGTN) was set up to strengthen the capacity of Caribbean Women's Organizations for understanding the impact of Trade Liberalization on women's economic and social advancement.

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### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

CAFRA is a regional network of feminist activists, researchers and women's organisations, which was launched at a regional conference marking the end of the UN Decade for Women, in April 1985. The Association's membership spans the Dutch, English, French and Spanish-speaking Caribbean.

CAFRA serves as a facilitator of the regional women's movement, responding to its needs and seeking to encourage regional collaboration and solidarity. In 1994, the Association was designated NGO Focal Point for the Caribbean Subregion, for the Fourth World Conference on Women, and for the Conference itself, held in September 1995.

The World Trade Organization came into being in January 1995 with a promise of improving livelihoods through the breaking down of barriers. This has proved disastrous for poor nations with the WTO policies being the single major treat to the fulfillment of the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action.

The story is told of the master pick-pocket's son who was born with a clenched fist. The baby was delivered by a respected midwife who shortly after reported the loss of a valuable ring. This lady's plight was overshadowed by the mystery of the baby's clenched fist.

The master pick pocket spared no expense to get medical expertise for his son. If that right hand remained clenched, how could the son follow in his father's footsteps? At last his efforts paid off, but as the baby's hands slowly opened like a flower, the amazed father saw something shining in his son's hand. It was the midwife's ring!

Just as surely, Beijing is being hijacked but women are resisting, and Beijing must

be released!

## REVIEW OF WORK COMPLETED SINCE BEIJING

The Beijing *Platform for Action* has defined twelve critical areas of concern, affecting the advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men, and outlined strategies for change.

Following the Beijing Conference, CAFRA, participated in several important follow-up actions, including:

- (a) Preparation of the CARICOM Post-Beijing Regional Plan of Action to the Year 2000
- (b) The Regional Advisory Committee on Women and Gender Issues, coordinated by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), to review the implications for the Caribbean of the *Platform for Action* and coordinate actions.
- (c) Preparation of a Caribbean NGO Regional Plan of Action.
- (d) CAFRA Coordinated an NGO Panel at the CARICOM/ ECLAC/ UNIFEM Post-Beijing Encounter: Caribbean Subregional Ministerial Conference, held in Guyana in August 1997.
- (e) Preparation of Alternative Progress Reports for Beijing +5 and Beijing +10 Assessments.
- (f) Participation in the Latin America and the Caribbean Forum on Women. Regional Conferences on Women Latin America and the Caribbean, the latest of which was held in Mexico in June, 2004.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION

Since 1995, there is evidence that economic and political forces have been responsible for measures and policies, which run counter to the commitments made by our governments for implementing the *Platform for Action*. Many existing and subsequent policy decisions are in direct contradiction to the promises made. For example, few national budgets address gender imbalances in resource allocation, and labour legislation continues to deny domestic workers the rights and protection enjoyed by other workers.

Except for Barbados, the political representation of women in elected bodies is far from the 30% requirement set by the Commonwealth Secretariat.

The UNDP Human Development Report 1998 shows the following.

Country	Women in government at ministerial level a(%) 1995
Barbados	33.3
Bahamas	20
Trinidad and Tobago	20
Dominica	8.3
Panama	11.1
Grenada	10
Jamaica	5.6
Guyana	11.1

Another grave concern is the withdrawal by some governments from international human rights conventions. This raises questions for us as to the future of governments' obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Optional Protocol to CEDAW, which should be open for signature, ratification and accession in 2000.

We have also seen a weakening of the partnership between government and NGOs that was so evident during the Beijing preparatory process and at the Conference itself, when several NGO representatives led the government negotiations on key aspects of the *Platform for Action*.

NGOs are called upon to assist in implementing the *Platform for Action*, at a time of dwindling resources. For example, CAFRA is among the social partners who

have been unable to access the European Union's resources for decentralised cooperation in partnership with CARIFORUM.

Effective collaboration between governments and NGOs is essential for any improvement of the quality of life of our people.

In spite of these constraints, women's NGOs maintain the need to act and advocate for change.

The low socio-economic status and growing poverty of women and their families, has led to hardship for vulnerable sectors of the population: indigenous women (who are to be found in the interior of Guyana and Suriname and in specific communities in Belize, Dominica and St. Vincent and the Grenadines) rural women, disabled women, young women and older women.

Employment of farmers –many of whom are women– in the banana export sector of some Caribbean countries is in serious jeopardy because of the United States' challenge to the preferential trade provisions granted by the EU to Caribbean countries through the Lomé agreement. The social and economic consequences of a complete closure of the banana export outlet, combined with the region's vulnerability to natural disasters, are serious obstacles to achieving the goals of the *Platform for Action*.

If police statistics are any indicator, then we are not doing enough to combat the problem of gender-based violence, and stem the growing current of misogyny in our region.

Also disturbing is the fact that in the Caribbean, the highest rate of new HIV infection is among adolescent girls. While women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and STDs is partly determined by physiological factors, it further reflects their wider economic, social and sexual vulnerability.

The trafficking in women for tourism and the sex trade, their recruitment for the drug trade and the growing number of Caribbean women incarcerated in the region and overseas for drug trafficking, are cause for concern.

The enabling environment must be created for implementation of the *Platform for Action*, through effective collaborative mechanisms.

## NEW INITIATIVES

In collaboration with intergovernmental agencies, several new initiatives were undertaken, including:

- a) The UNIFEM Campaign for Women's Human Rights to end violence against women and children, which included a plan to train Police Officers in Domestic Violence prevention and treatment.
- b) The Caribbean Sub-region of the Global Network of Women in Politics. Several countries represented in the network have undertaken projects to support and train women candidates for local and national elections.
- c) The Regional Network of Domestic Workers in the Caribbean, to achieve full recognition of domestic workers as workers in law and practice, and improve their status and terms and conditions of work.
- d) The Caribbean Reference Group (CRG) on trade and development issues, which is preparing a regional NGO/Civil Society position on a new cooperation agreement between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific States (ACP). Within this group, CAFRA is lobbying for the integration of a gender perspective into all fields covered by the Convention.
- e) An important conference, the Vital Voices of the Caribbean, which provided a forum for women leaders to establish a sustainable culture of support among them and addressed specific objectives of the *Platform for Action*, in particular, equal access to decision making and institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women.
- f) The formation of the Caribbean Gender and Trade Network (CGTN) to specifically address the impact of trade liberalization on livelihoods. The CGTN conducts research, advocacy and economic literacy programmes around trade issues



## **PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE ACTION**

NGOs and governments must enter into new levels of partnership. Governments are urged to consider the following priorities for future action:

1. Include representatives of non-governmental organisations on the official delegations to the Regional Conferences on Women of Latin America and the Caribbean, and the UN Special Sessions to assess the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.
2. Take action to put into effect the target of having at least 30 per cent female representation in local and national governments and other decision-making bodies.
3. Support the Police Training Programme for Domestic Violence prevention and treatment, and invest in programme strategies and processes aimed specifically at children, pre-teens and young adults to stem the trend of violence against women in our societies.
4. Support the proposal emerging from the Vital Voices of the Caribbean Conference, for a Regional Leadership Training Institute, to provide training for and technical assistance to, women leaders and women's organisations.
5. Recognise domestic workers as workers in law and practice and ensure that they receive all the legal rights and protections accorded to other workers.
6. Add HIV/AIDS to the action agendas of all government ministries.
7. Consider the implications for gender planning in the Beijing *Platform for Action*, and other, Programmes of Action, such as *Agenda 21*, and those adopted by the Vienna Conference on Human Rights (1993), the Small Island Developing States (1994), and the International Conference on Population and Development (1994); and produce gender-sensitive budgets for their implementation.
8. Enter into partnership with NGOs and community-based organisations (CBOs), to carry out various communication and training activities.
9. Ensure that the Regional Negotiating Machinery (RNM) is sensitised to the commitments of the Beijing *Platform for Action*, and use the negotiations for a post-Lomé IV agreement as an opportunity to allocate resources for women's development.

10. Ensure that the staff at UN missions is well briefed and maintains proper communication with their capitals, various government departments and NGOs, to enable them to negotiate meaningfully at important international fora.

11. Upgrade the Women's Bureaux with staff and other resources, to enable them to effectively monitor trends and implement actions for women's advancement.

12. Commit resources to enable capacity building in gender analysis and management in key institutions, particularly those responsible for and affected by sectoral reform.

## **VISION FOR THE FUTURE**

The women's movement intends to work collectively and alongside government for fulfillment of the goals of Beijing.

The vision of the future remains one in which social justice is realised for all. Implementation of the CARICOM Regional Plan of Action, and use of CARICOM model legislation as a basis for legal reform, will engage governments and NGOs in a meaningful partnership; a partnership in which each brings their resources to the table, and collaborates, while maintaining their autonomy.