Launch Gender Regional Study at UN Women, New York

Work & Family: Latin American & Caribbean Women in Search of a New Balance

By Laura Chioda & Augusto de La Torre
(Chief Economist, Latin America & Caribbean Region)
Four decades of important achievements in the gender parity agenda

- Education
- Health
- Female Labor Force Participation
- Female Political Participation
- Social Norms

All of this in the context of broader strides towards social equity in LAC (poverty, income inequality, middle class)
Girls have closed the education gap (enrollment, achievement, attainment) & now tend to outperform boys.

Young women in LAC complete secondary and tertiary education at the same or higher rate than young men.

Mexico lags behind the regional average in both dimensions.

Notable exception: indigenous population where poverty pockets are chronic.

Data: Barro & Lee (2011)
While both sexes are living longer in LAC, women outlive men by more than 6 years.

- In 1960 life expectancy was 57 (W) & 54 (M); 76.7 (W) and 70.5 (M) at present.
- 220.6 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 1980; 102.4 at present (Murray et al 2010).
- Variance across the region has declined, as reductions have been greatest where the MMR was highest in 1980s.
Fertility in LAC is converging toward OECD levels

- 6 births per woman in 1960 to 2 at present (as in OECD)
- For the LAC-7, fertility declined steeply in 70s; a more gradual decline for the rest
- Adolescent fertility rates remain high (70 births per 1,000 girls ages 15-19); above OECD, but in line with SAR (70) and below SSA (111)
An additional 70 million women have joined LAC’s labor force since the 1980s

- Female LFP rose from 36% in 80s to 52% at present
- Today women represent 40% of total labor force
- In most countries, female LFP doubled, and tripled in Brazil

Source: Chioda (2011b)
Female Parliamentary Representation in LAC the highest among all Regions

- Lots of heterogeneity behind the regional average
- Candidate quota schemes have been on the rise since the early 1990s
- First adopted by Argentina in 1991; today in 11 countries
Anti-egalitarian views regarding rights and abilities have softened in LAC.

- More egalitarian sentiments are concentrated in the young & more educated (men and women)
- On average women have more egalitarian views than men
... but views regarding gender roles within the family have remained roughly unchanged

- Both men and women tend to believe that young children are likely to suffer if their mothers work.

- But, younger & more educated women tend to deem that a woman’s identity extends beyond her role as a housewife...

- ...& that working mothers can have just as healthy relationships with their children as stay-at-home mothers.
The parity agenda played a major role in moving societies away from unfair and inefficient equilibria.

- Equality of access to basic services and fundamental human rights is an ethical imperative.

Must avoid temptation to normatively (and naively) conclude that:

- Equalization of access (health, education) should result in equalization of labor market outcomes (extent and nature of female LFP, wages).
- Women’s well-being is unequivocally tied to labor force outcomes.

Evidence substantiates this warning:

- U-shaped relationship between economic development & female LFP.
- Nonlinear relationship between family formation & female LFP.
Robust empirical regularity: U-shaped relationship between female LFP and per capita income

Conversely, same female LFP is consistent with different levels of per capita income (e.g., Brazil vs. SSA)

Chilean women have 10.5 years of education vs. 7.1 of their Brazilian counterparts, yet have a much lower LFP

With rising female education and income in East Asia, female LFP has been falling
Female LFP reductions are more strongly associated with marriage than child-bearing, except among more educated women.

The reduction in LFP as a function of marriage is U-shaped (less for tertiary and for less than primary).

Different motives (need vs. career orientation) lead to similar LFP behavior, but may have different welfare implications (freedom of choice).

In US: Wage gap among elite professionals has closed, but it emerges upon child bearing.

Source: Chioda & Demombynes (2010)
The non-mechanical connection between access and outcomes reflects complex mediation mechanism.

The report emphasizes the role of mediators in shaping Economic Opportunity & LFP decisions.
...More on mediation mechanisms

- **Preferences**
  - Large body of evidence that establishes gender differences beyond the obvious biological ones (risk aversion, investment in children, stronger propensities for cooperation, multitasking, etc.)

- **Individuals are part of larger economic units: the family**
  - It is within the household that divergences of opinion, preferences, and comparative advantages are negotiated to reach decisions
    - Interactions can be either cooperative or noncooperative

- **Norms inform and shape behavior**
  - They are embodied in preferences in various degrees and are non-independent of education
Women in Search of a New Balance

- Paradoxically the progress in the equality agenda breeds a second generation of challenges:
  - As women’s choice sets expand, so does the scope for tensions & trade-offs
  - Tensions partly linked to ongoing redefinition of women’s identities & aspirations (e.g., from jobs to careers, mother’s guilt)

- The unending quest to balance work & family demands flexibility:
  - Informal sector of labor market meets a growing demand for flexibility that formal sector does not
  - Informal child care arrangements meet demands for flexibility where formal child care is nonexistent or expensive

- Lack of such flexibility does not appear to constrain women from entering the labor market
  - but evidence suggests flexible provisions (e.g. Argentina’s “flexibilization” of labor contracts and public provision of child care in several countries) improve the quality of women’s participation
Gender policy is at a crucial juncture: New directions

- **Need to revisit gender policy goals and expectations:**
  - Complexity of links from access to outcomes to welfare
  - From gender blindness to gender consciousness
  - Emphasis on equality of opportunity and equity of outcomes

- **Expanded policy menu, taking into account household dynamics**
  - When dynamics are conflictual is justified family efficiency, not just equity grounds
  - Any policy that affects household dynamics and bargaining power becomes a gender policy
  - Few policies except CCTs take family interaction into account

- **It is all about expanding freedom of choice, facilitating the quest for balance, and enhancing well-being**
  - This provides strong grounds to ensure that labor market contracts are family friendly