Title: Gender Inequality in Women's Political Participation in Latin America and the
Caribbean

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Abstract:
Throughout history, women's political participation has been mainly in the exercise of their rights, rather than their direct participation in this manner. This has occurred due to multiple factors, among others, the existence of a patriarchal order, political parties' resistance to the entry of women, harassment and political violence towards them, and other multiple factors.

This document is presented with a sufficiently documented example of the case of Ecuador where there is a program that expects women's insertion in politics, showing its emerging results and also two more cases in order to consider factors that facilitate equality or inequality in this topic.

Besides all efforts, it's still needed to make this planning real, so that the gap in opportunities for political participation between men and women becomes smaller. Also the strong marginalization of indigenous and/or rural women is depriving the Latin American countries from their great contributions to regional development, since they have very clear demands, which could enrich their respective territories.

Keywords: gender, participation, politica, Latin America, Caribe.

Gender Inequality in Women's Political Participation in Latin America and the Caribbean

Claudia Ranaboldo & Yolanda Solana

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AECID	Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo (Spanish Agency for International Cooperation for Development)
AMUME	Asociación de Mujeres Municipalistas del Ecuador (Association of Women Municipality Workers of Ecuador)
CONAMU	Consejo Nacional de la Mujer (National Council on Women)
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
FUNDEMUCA	Fundación para el Desarrollo Local y el Fortalecimiento Municipal e Institucional en Centro América y el Caribe (Foundation for Local Development and Municipal and Institutional Strengthening in Central America and the Caribbean)
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
RIMISP	Centro Latinoamericano para el Desarrollo Rural (Latin American Center for Rural Development)
UN-INSTRAWUN	International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Problem of Gender Inequality in Women's Political Participation in Latin America and the Caribbean

Women's political participation can be described according to the history of its denial and conquest. For women, enjoyment of political rights is linked to their construction as citizens, which makes it necessary to differentiate between citizen participation and formal political participation. In this journey, women have often placed more emphasis on participating –in the democratic construction- than on getting to make a decision about it.

The elements that currently characterize women's political participation in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) are related to the following factors:

- Participation in spaces of formal power as an incomplete right
- The right to identity as a basic and as yet unresolved condition
- Decentralization as an ambiguous opportunity for women
- Political participation and indigenous women as the expression of a triple inequality

The Main Causes of Inequality

The following are some of the many elements that cause and perpetuate inequality between men and women in the area of political participation and representation:

- The continuation –though it has been weakened- of a patriarchal gender order
- Poverty as a multi-dimensional condition that affects women and has greater connotations for women who are poor and indigenous
- Incomplete government reform and modernization processes that lead to institutional fragility
- Lack of support for national mechanisms for equality
- Political parties' resistance to the presence of women
- Emergence of multiple local and national identities that frequently require that more complex dialogues be constructed and maintained over time
- Harassment and political violence against women

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An Example: Ecuador

We have chosen Ecuador as a case study for this article because the country's situation has been sufficiently documented and is interesting to consider in this context based on the following criteria: (i) presence of a body of laws, standards, policies and institutions that favour women's political participation; and (ii) incipient results and persistence of problems with formal participation and related aspects.

Our discussion addresses the context of opportunities for and limitations to women's political participation at the national level, paying special attention to rural and indigenous women in Ecuador. We also consider two specific cases in Ecuador, Cuenca and Nabón, identifying the main factors that contribute to the reduction or reproduction of political inequality at the local level, emphasizing formal and informal institutions that have an influence in both contexts.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Some conclusions and recommendations are identified on the axes that have emerged as a constant above and beyond the case example, acquiring relevance for LAC and especially for the local/rural contexts that have been the main focus of this article.

Overcoming the distance between the formal aspects of legislation and planning and the real practice of public management oriented towards equality of opportunities.
Researchers have detected a high level of concern for normative, formal and instrumental aspects of political participation in Latin America. The region has seen significant production of norms, decrees, plans and participatory budgets with a focus on gender and ad hoc instances (committees, councils, boards, etc.). In many cases, we have arrived at a certain "rituality" of women's political participation but have not had a major impact in real life.
This stage should be enriched through specific initiatives based on best practices and more operational tools adapted to each context that help bring about real and lasting change. In this sense, it seems important to focus on local processes –rather than specific projects for strengthening women's participation and gender institutionalism-

which:
- Show legitimacy and recognition of public management and managers by citizens and women in particular.
- Reveal public/private inter-institutional coordination at the territorial level that is committed to the gender approach, ensuring that the issue is not limited by small groups or associations that are often not linked to women.
- Make connections between national/local norms/laws (including the signing of international agreements and accords) and viable local ones that make sense for the local population.
- Look to give continuity to policies and investments in the medium- and long-terms.
- Strengthen local governments and the local political community so that development processes are inclusive, sustainable and linked to the territory.

Addressing women's participation as one of the axis of a broader territorial focus

It is evident that women –especially indigenous women and campesinas- have demands and in some cases agendas that are very much linked to local economic development, particularly at rural level. While moving the border of formal representation and political participation –at national and local levels- has been key for traditionally marginalized populations, there is a need to address territorial development programmes that:

- Attack all of the causes that affect equality of opportunities and women's political participation.
- Go beyond a restrictive vision of poverty as a simple matter of lack, addressing it from the point of view of the valorisation and coordination of existing local assets.
- Coordinate specific and simultaneous actions in three fields: political participation, social inclusion and economic development.
- Address the "cultural identities" present within a territory as a possible catalyzing axis for territorial valorisation with women as leaders, which will also contribute to the dismantling of conservative cultural patterns.

Expressing New Approaches and Tools for Capacity Building

Over the past few decades, LAC has seen the development of many awareness, training and educational activities with gender components. There are currently several initiatives aimed at formalizing schools for women's leadership and political training.

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While there has not been a global quali-quantitative evaluation of all of these processes, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that following this logic does not guarantee the creation of a critical mass that is innovative and capable enough to address the multiple facets of the issue of political participation. This is especially true at the local level and for rural men and women. There is a need to rethink training processes that:

- Strengthen technical and political abilities, the latter of which should not be limited to ideology.
- Invest in renewed young leaderships that help revert the phenomena of caudillismo (autocratic governance) and concentration of power that are also part of some women's organisations
- Integrate men and agencies (and not only women's organizations), seeking out new synergies.
- Learn from life and local experiences through processes that combine practical experience, knowledge and analysis.
- Coordinate sustained and recognized processes of educational and training public policies from different countries.

1. THE PROBLEM OF GENDER INEQUALITY IN WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Women's political participation can be described according to the history of its denial and conquest. For women, enjoyment of political rights is linked to their construction as citizens. The women's movement and feminist movement have been the main forces in this long struggle for equality. In this journey, women often have placed more emphasis on participating –in the democratic construction- than on getting to make a decision about it.

In a broad sense, political participation can be linked to citizen participation in public matters. It is expressed through different channels and dynamics and presents varying levels of implication for subjects (associations built around a common interest, participation in protests, social institutions, contact with authorities, inclusion in vetting processes, and other forms of exercising participatory democracy).

Formal political participation refers to access to systems of representation and is summarized as the people's right to elect and be elected through a vote and to access decision-making positions in government agencies and public institutions through legitimately established mechanisms.

> ➢ **Participation in Spaces of Formal Power: An Incomplete Right**

De jure **but not** *de facto* **Rights: The Equality Gap**

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
- Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952)
- International Agreement on Civil and Political Rights (1966)
- Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women–CEDAW- (1979)
- Platform of Action of the IV World Women's Conference of Beijing (1995)
- United Nations Summit on Millennium Development Goals (2000)

The democratizing trend of the past 30 years in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is a context that has leant itself to improving women's political participation in all of its applications. Women and indigenous communities are recognized as the two most important and active new forces in this democratic reconstruction. The countries of the continent have signed national and international agreements that support, recommend and order the promotion of women's political rights. However, equal inclusion of women in all areas of formal power is far from guaranteed. The data presented in the graphics below show that women hold less than 50% of the positions considered in all 11 nations.

Graphic 1: Percentage of Women in Elected and Decision-Making Positions in 11 Latin American Nations- 2007
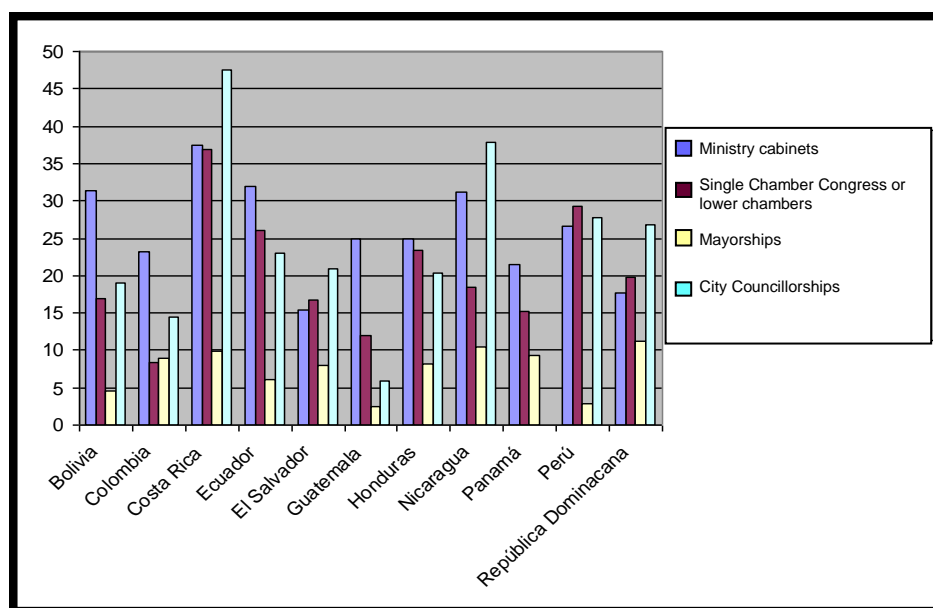
Source: Generated by the authors using data from Llanos and Sample (2007)

As Graphic 1 demonstrates, though there are considerable differences, women's presence in collegiate government agencies is much higher than in mayors' offices in all of the countries under study. Several studies on women's political participation (Massolo 2006a; Bareiro 2004; Llanos and Sample 2008) found that it is still very difficult for women to access uninominal positions. The presence of two women presidents in the region

(Michelle Bachelet in Chile and Cristina Kirchner in Argentina) does not contradict this. If we translate that into percentages, women's representation in such positions remains in the single digits. Another issue is the symbolic value of these presidencies and the impact that they generate in public opinion and the collective imaginary regarding the legitimacy of women leading public management.

An analysis of the evolution of the data for municipal governments over a 10 year period shows that the rate of increase is significantly higher in collegiate positions of local governments (city councillorships). This trend is also observed in the legislature and ministries (Graphic 2).

Graphic 2: Latin America (25 Nations): Regional Evolution of the Presence of Women in Local Power, 1996-2006
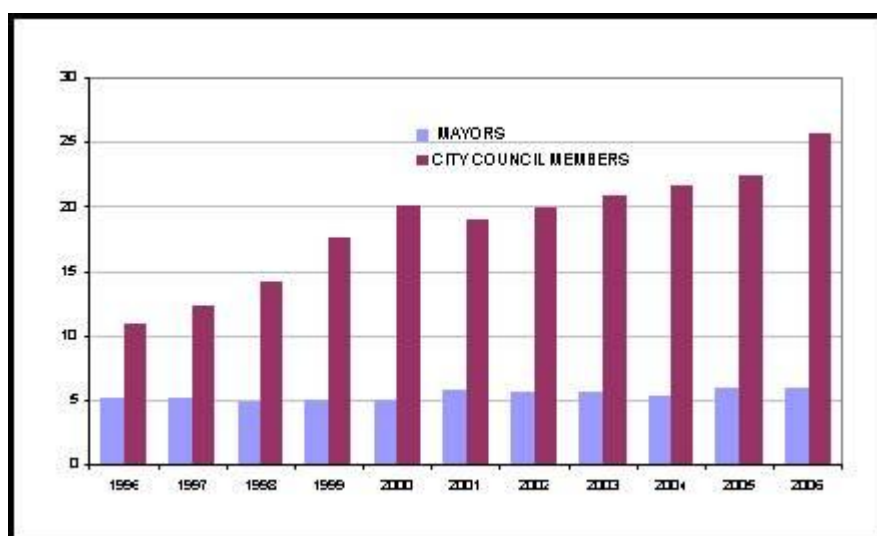
This increase in women's presence in collegiate agencies can be partially explained by the passage of quota laws in some countries in the region. These affirmative action policies are aimed at accelerating women's access to elected positions. This type of action can be legally introduced if two conditions are met: (i) there is demonstrated discrimination in the field in which it is applied; and (ii) the measure is temporary (the law is withdrawn when the discrimination is corrected). These actions mainly require political parties to include a minimum percentage of female candidates for elected positions. This type of

instrument is currently in place in 11 countries in the region.[1] These laws have been the subject of various analyses that consider the different formulations of these measures, other variables that affect their application, and the impact that they have had by country.[2] In general, there is a consensus that:

- Implementing a quota law is an effective way of increasing women's presence in elected positions.
- Such programs should be accompanied by a series of complementary measures in order to ensure that they meet their objectives.
- This is a means to eradicate gender inequality in this area (not an end).

It is difficult to ensure that the quota is applied and that it affects uninominal posts. This may partially explain the stagnation or only slight increase in the number of female mayors elected between 1996 and 2006 shown in Graphic 2.

> ➢ **The Right to Identity: A basic condition as yet unresolved**

Several countries in the region have yet to provide access to the civil registry for their entire population, which is another right that is basic to –and precedes- access to political and decision-making positions. Most of the estimates that have been made have focused on children and adolescents because these are the two groups most affected by the problem. Research indicates that 15% of children under the age of five in this continent have not been registered, though this varies by country. Estimates in Peru put the number at 8.4%, while the problem is thought to impact 25.8% of children in that age group in the Dominican Republic. In Central America, more than 200,000 children are not registered each year.[3] According to the Inter-American Institute for Children (Instituto Interamericano del Niño, 2007), failure to register births has a profound impact on populations that face greater levels of social exclusion. It is more likely that a child who has not been registered will be poor, live in a rural area, have a mother with a low educational level and belong to certain ethnic groups.

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[1] Quotas have been introduced in the following countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay and Peru. Argentina was the first to adopt them (1991) and Honduras was the most recent nation to do so (2000).

[2] In October 2008 the International Seminar"Una década de Cuota Femenina en América Latina. Balance y perspectivas para la participación política de la Mujer" was held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. Many of these analyses were presented at the event. They are available online at: http://www.jce.do/resultados/Default.aspx?alias=www.jce.do/resultados/cuotafemenina

[3] Instituto Interamericano del Niño, la Niña y Adolescentes "El Derecho a la Identidad: Oportunidad y Retos." Paper presented at IV Meeting of Civil Registry, Identity and Vital Statistics Directors of Latin America. Mexico City, July-August 2007.

Given that many women are affected by forms of discrimination apart from gender discrimination (ethnic and economic), it is possible that this under-registering affects them more than men from the same groups or sectors (Ranaboldo, Cliche, Castro 2006).

> ## ➤ Decentralization as an Ambiguous Opportunity for Women

Every government in the region has addressed the issue of decentralization. This type of government reform is recognized as being increasingly important as a necessary instrument for strengthening democracy and building inclusive governance models that privilege equitable and sustainable human development.

In keeping with all that this type of development implies, several studies have affirmed that decentralization processes should facilitate and promote integration of the gender perspective and increased women's participation (UNRISD 2005; Massolo 2006a; Llanos, 2007). These same analyses find it difficult to demonstrate this link.

According to Massolo (2006a), decentralization has the potential to generate greater inclusion of women in sub-national government agencies and favour the creation of spaces for citizen participation under certain conditions. However, given that it involves redistributing power among institutions, people and groups, it generates conflicts of interest. In a context of structural discrimination against women, it is more difficult for them to ensure that their interests (social, political, economic and cultural) will be reflected in the apparatus of local government and management of public policy.

Other studies mention a lack and deficient presence of women's demands in local governments' development policies and plans. This is related to the lower presence of women in decision-making and elected positions within municipal governments (Massolo 2006a and 2006b; FUNDEMUCA 2006).

Many speak of the need to generate a "critical mass" of women in decision-making and elected positions at all levels. It is important to recognize that this objective is necessary but not sufficient. The gap in representation is both quantitative and qualitative, which means that representatives (both male and female) are not capable of influencing and making decisions about building public policy that takes all women's interests into account.

➢ **Political Participation and Indigenous Women: Triple Inequality**

The following table, which presents the main strengths and weaknesses of the political and social participation of indigenous women, is based on a study conducted by UN-INSTRAW and RIMISP (Ranaboldo, Cliche, Castro 2006) in five countries with an indigenous presence in LAC (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala and Peru).

Table 1: Political and Social Participation of Indigenous Women at the Local Level

Strengths

• Positioning of the indigenous issue in international and national spaces
• Visualization of the magnitude and diversity of indigenous communities in LAC
• Indigenous policy proposals tend to democratize governance and local governance, looking to overcome historic concerns and discrimination
• Greater ability for exercise of citizenship and interpolation for respect for the rights of indigenous communities
• Existence of demands of women in different areas (political, economic, social, cultural) that can be closely linked to access to information and the exercise of rights, which represent a continuity between public and private spheres and posit political interpolation
• Affirmative action mechanisms such as systems and quota laws represent an opportunity
• Local government offers greater opportunities for the participation of indigenous communities

Weaknesses

• Scant visibility of the specific situation of indigenous women
• Incoherencies and contradictions in data from the census in regard to the evolution of their political participation; general lacks in the disaggregation of gender in available data
• Tension between concepts of government and governance held by national governments and the international community and the indigenous vision of the same concepts (influenced by uses and customs, traditional structures of indigenous organization, tendencies toward self-determination and autonomy)
• Conservative postures of traditional indigenous organizations that have a critical

influence on opportunities for empowering women
• The opportunity to participate in local government does not automatically lead to active participation by women at the executive or legislative levels in municipal governments, nor to agencies or mechanisms for citizen observation
• In mixed organizations, women are assigned to lower positions that are related to their traditional roles
• Difficulty structuring a separate agenda in the context of a common list of demands and proposals for indigenous communities. The positions of indigenous women tend to adjust to/assimilate into tendencies expressed by the main indigenous organizations, most of which are led by men

Source: Summary based on Ranaboldo, Cliche and Castro (2006).

2. THE MAIN CAUSES OF INEQUALITY

Some of the many causes that originate and perpetuate inequality between men and women in regard to political participation and representation are:

- **Continuation –though it has diminished- of a patriarchal gender order** that maintains a sexual division of labou0072, limiting women to the private space and men to the public realm. This reproduces the patriarchal apparatus within political culture, shaping how politics is practiced. This is in turn influenced by rules, strategies and behaviours –formal and informal- that are marked by the masculine. If we consider that women have less representation, that the reproductive workload continues to mainly fall to them, that in spite of being incorporated into the labour market they have less economic autonomy and that they have been exercising political power for a much shorter period of time, one can infer that they face more challenges when it comes to **entering, staying in and influencing the political** spaces in which they act and imprint changes. Analyses of these elements of political culture tend to find the same (Massolo 2006a, Montaño 2008; Llanos and Sample 2008a and 2008b).

- **Poverty.** Though a series of criticisms has been made regarding the way in which poverty is measured,[4] the index of female poverty and proportion of households

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[4] "Most of the indicators of poverty that we currently use are not sensitive to gender. Measuring poverty on the basis of income does not reflect the situation of men and women or identify the factors that intervene in the difficulties that they

led by women that are in a situation of indigence show that poverty affects women more seriously in LAC. "Women face a series of disadvantages with respect to men that range from unpaid domestic work and lack of social recognition of higher unemployment and salary discrimination as well as inequality of access, use and control of resources and the slowness of their political participation." (Las mujeres sufren una serie de desventajas con respecto a los hombres, que van desde el trabajo doméstico no remunerado y la falta de reconocimiento social al mayor desempleo y la discriminación salarial, así como la desigualdad en el acceso, uso y control de los recursos productos y la lentitud en el progreso de su participación política. Montaño 2007:53, the emphasis is ours). Several studies also show a link between poverty, gender and ethnic inequality.[5]

- **Unfinished government reform and modernization processes**, which are accompanied by **institutional fragility** that varies but is present in most countries in the region. This makes it difficult for Latin American governments to guarantee respect for the rights of citizenship and implement public policies that are in keeping with the problems to be resolved, including inequality between men and women. Two common reforms that have a more direct influence on women's political participation involve electoral systems and decentralization. Women's limited participation in the design and leadership of these reforms makes it more difficult for their interests, demands and proposals to be incorporated into government instruments (Mones, 2004). Given that decentralization is still a young process, which in some cases is reflected in proposals and models close to the "de-concentration of the crisis," the fragility of a good part of municipal and intermediate governments (when they exist) is still more pressing than in central apparatuses (Díaz 2006a and 2006b).

- **Lack of sufficient support for national mechanisms for equality**.[6] In spite of the important role that they play in the promotion of public policies for equality

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face in order to overcome it." (La mayoría de los indicadores de pobreza en uso no son sensibles al género, la medición de la pobreza por ingresos no refleja la situación de hombres y mujeres ni identifica los factores que intervienen en las dificultades que unos y otras enfrentan para superarla. (Montaño 2007:53). According to ECLAC's Women and Development Unit, the main limitations of these indicators are: i) taking the home and not individuals as the unit of analysis (lack of disaggregation); ii) failing to consider unpaid domestic labor as income; and iii) the supposition of equal distribution of resources among all members of the households and that their needs are equal.

[5] For an analysis of the current situation, see Trivelli's article for this conference, "La persistente desigualdad entre indígenas y no indígenas en América Latina."

[6] This refers to government agencies (ministries, vice-ministries and similar offices as well as services and institutes) with jurisdiction over the formulation of policies and public investment in gender, equity and equality of opportunities.

and their push to include issues of gender on national and international agendas, the limited institutionalization of the State and party-centred changes have a negative impact on their insertion into the general structure of the government – changing range- and their continuity. There are thus irregularities in the availability and quality of human, material and technical resources; the assignment of responsibilities; and the management of consistent, effective and efficient policies for eradicating discrimination against women. If we refer back to the local environment, **most countries have very limited abilities to bring policy down to the municipal level** and implement actions in coordination with women's organizations in this area (Díaz 2006a and 2006b).

- **Political parties' resistance to the presence of women.** According to Llanos and Sample (2008b), though most of the region's political parties did not have information on the gender of their supporters, unofficial data suggest that women represent between 40-50% of their members. According to the same authors, this drops to less than 30% in government agencies and decision-making positions. Given that political parties are the main channel for accessing elected and decision-making positions within the public apparatus, they are key actors for promoting changes or maintaining discrimination. However, they continue to be noted in most of the literature on the subject as one of the main obstacles to women's access to formal power (Llanos and Sample 2008a and 2008b; Massolo 2006a; Bueno 2007). In the local context, particularly in rural areas in countries in which other forms of access to municipal power have been arbitrated (civic committees and similar agencies), the parties could have less force when it comes time to present candidacies. However, there is also evidence that patriarchal political culture and tradition have an influence in these spaces, which makes it just as difficult for women to access the political arena (Massolo 2006a). **Campaign and party financing** (Llanos and Sample 2008b; Bueno 2007) is another obstacle to women's access to politics because they have less economic autonomy and access to financial resources (Montaño 2008) that they could use to promote their candidacies, which limits their presence in the media. According to Llanos and Sample (2008a), an IDEA study on the 2006 general elections in Peru demonstrated that male candidates spend an average of 4.6 times as much on publicity in private media channels as their female counterparts.

- The democratic strengthening that the region has undergone over the past few

decades has opened new spaces for citizen participation and incorporated new social actors into the political landscape. (Women and indigenous peoples are two of the most important groups, as are people of African descent). The **emergence of multiple identities** opens up a much more complex and diverse space for dialogue among the actors that represent them and requires that they have knowledge of and recognize each other. It also makes it more difficult to build agendas based on consensus. This is an opportunity for women to enjoy full political participation, but it is not free of risks due to structural discrimination (Díaz 2006a and 2006b). There is therefore a need to improve alliances, dialogues, networks and pacts among different women's groups and other political and social actors.

- **Political violence and harassment**[7] against women are increasingly frequent at all levels. The phenomenon became visible as women's political participation increased. Laws against political violence and harassment have been proposed in some countries (Bolivia was first and was immediately followed by Ecuador and then by some Central American nations).

3. AN EXAMPLE: ECUADOR

We have chosen Ecuador as a case study for this article because the country's situation has been sufficiently documented and is interesting to consider in this context based on the following criteria:

a) presence of a body of laws, standards, policies and institutions that favor women's political participation; and

b) incipient results and persistence of problems regarding formal participation and related aspects.

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[7] Political harassment: An illicit act committed by a person on his or her own or through a third party against a women or her family in order to impede or restrict the exercise of a public office or induce an action or omission in the fulfillment of her duties through acts of pressure or persecution, harassment or threats by any means whether evident or simulated. Political violence: An illicit act committed by a person on his or her own or through a third party against a women or her family in order to impede or restrict the exercise of a public office or induce her to make decisions against her will and principles through acts that cause physical, moral or sexual damage. See: http://www.un-instraw.org/es/proyecto-participacion-politica/general/violencia-politica-2.html

In Section 3.1 we address opportunities for and limitations to women's political participation at the national level, paying special attention to rural and indigenous women in Ecuador.

Section 3.2 presents a review of two specific cases in Ecuador, Cuenca and Nabón, identifying the main factors that contribute to the reduction or reproduction of political inequality at the local level, emphasizing formal and information institutions that have an influence in both contexts.

3.1. Context of Opportunities[8] and Limitations at the National Level

Ecuador may be one of the nations in LAC that has advanced the most (and especially that has maintained over time a relative stability as compared to over countries) in the areas of institutionalism and laws designed to promote equal opportunities in various areas, including political participation.

3.1.1. Opportunities

Legislation
Law of Quotas for Improved Women's Participation. Beginning in 2000, Ecuador established a minimum pre-requisite of 30% inclusion of women on electoral lists. This percentage is to increase by 5% with each general election until equal representation is achieved. This mechanism has increased the percentage of women elected to parliament (single chamber). According to data presented at ECLAC's X Regional Conference on Women (Montaño 2008), the percentage of female candidates went from a scant 5% before the application of the law to over 15% in the first elections in which it was applied. There has been a progressive increase since then and the final goal for participation of members of the Constituent Assembly was met (full equality was achieved and 50% of the candidates were women). However, in the end only 45 women were elected –as compared to 85 men- and they represented just 35% of the full membership of 130.[9]

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[8] Based on UN-INSTRAW data. See: www.un-instraw.org/es/proyecto-participacion-politica/ecuador/
[9] See www.asambleaconstituyente.gov.ec

Law against Violence against Women and the Family, No. 103 of 1995. The application of this law in defense of physical, psychological and sexual integrity led to the creation of institutions such as police stations for women and the family. The government's recognition of violence as a multi-faceted problem that is social and political and a matter of public health and safety is considered to be one of the most important advances for the women's movement in Ecuador (AMUME 2008).

Decentralization Process
Ecuador's Law on Decentralization of the State and Social Participation was passed in 1997. The country currently has 24 provinces, 219 districts, 193 municipalities, 796 Rural Parish Boards and 462 Urban Parish Boards.
Article 257 of the country's new Constitution (2008) establishes the possibility of creating indigenous or Afro-Ecuadorian territories that would have an autonomous government and be guided by the principles of inter-culturality, pluri-nationality and agreement regarding collective rights.[10]

Gender Institutions
The National Council on Women (CONAMU) –which was created in October 1997 through Executive Decree No. 764- is the lead agency for the formulation and promotion of public policy with a gender focus. It is attached to the Presidency of the Republic of Ecuador. CONAMU's members include government representatives and women's organizations such as the Association of Women Municipality Workers of Ecuador (AMJUPRE) and the Association of Provincial Council Members of Ecuador (Asociación de Consejeras Provinciales del Ecuador, ACOPE). These agencies seek to develop decentralized management, channeling services in provinces, municipalities and parish boards.
CONAMU formulated the "Equal Opportunities Plan" (2005-2009), which is focused on key issues and fundamental rights. Its strategic approaches including promoting and protecting social and political participation, exercise of women's citizenship, and democratic governance. The agency also directly supports the legal recognition of various women's organizations.

Multi-ethnic Country
According to Ecuador's National Institute for Statistics and Census (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censo del Ecuador, INEC), in the VI Census in 2001, the country's

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[10] See www.asambleaconstituyente.gov.ec

population self-identified as follows: mestizo (74.4%), white (10.5%), Amerindian (6.8%), mulatto (2.7%), black (2.2%) and other (0.3%). This data has been questioned by some sources (Ranaboldo, Cliche and Castro 2006). Communities of African descent and specifically women from said communities are becoming increasingly visible in the Constituent process.[11] In theory, this would imply a context of diverse cultural identities that, if valued and given the possibility of coexisting, could constitute a net asset for the country.

3.1.2. Limitations

In spite of all of this, the legislation, decentralization processes, institutions and diversity have not promoted more sustainable processes of political participation and equal opportunities for women. Rural and indigenous women are most notoriously left out of this process.

Political Participation in the Local Context

Graphic 3: Women in Local Power

According to available information on the most recent electoral period, 2.8% of mayorships in Ecuador were held by women. During the same period, it was found that 29.8% of council members were women.

Alcaldías

Mujeres
2.8%

Hombres
97.2%

Concejos

Mujeres
29.8%

Hombres
70.2%

Sources: http://www.un-instraw.org/es/proyecto-participacion-politica/ecuador/

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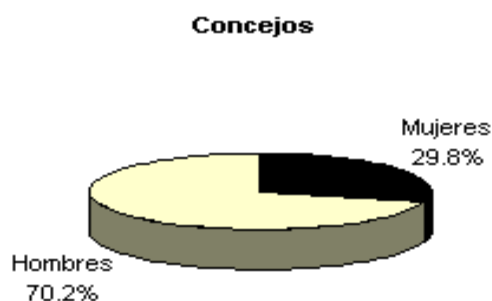
[11] See: Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres Afroecuatorianas. "Cimarronas… por nuestra reivindicación", Quito (23 y 24 de febrero 2008). Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Negras-CONAMUNE; Red de Mujeres Afroamericanas, Afrocaribeñas y de la Diáspora-Región Andina. CONAMU; UN-INSTRAW/RIMISP/AECID.

The most recent data (2007) suggest that 6% of mayors and 23% of council members are women (Llanos and Sample, 2008a). This again shows the difficulty of making progress in local governments.

On the other hand, Ecuador continues to have social participation agencies in local governments, generally community councils that are called to participate in plans for local government management and/or development.

Gender Violence
The most recent data from the 32 Women and Family Police Stations show that some 60,000 complaints are filed each year. In 2006, 87% of those complaints were made by women. According to data provided by the National Police, on average 2,500 complaints per year involve rape and sexual assault (AMUME 2008). AMUME and other institutions are promoting a new law against such acts, which is being developed.

Poverty
Some current data describe a situation of inequality that links rural women to poverty, particularly in the agricultural sector. We will mention only a few results:
- Inequality of income: Only 23% of women in rural areas receive an income; women participate in only 3.93% of the total income in spite of the fact that their participation in EAP is 14.12%; in the agricultural sector their income is lower (only US$88.50 per month).
- Underemployment: 81.7% of rural women are underemployed;
- Unpaid domestic work: 80% of domestic labour is done by women;
- Access to productive resources: Only 30% of rural women have individual titles; only 18% of rural households with property registered to them are headed by women; only 4% of rural women received credit (FAO, 2008).

All of these indicators demonstrate that the situation is worse for women than it is for men, especially at the rural level.

Indigenous Women
The problem of the relationship between politics –including local politics- and indigenous women and their organizations is a complex one with multiple fronts that include differing concepts of decentralization and autonomy and the dispute between traditional collectives and universal individual rights (Ranaboldo, Cliche and Castro, 2006). This crosses various fields, from family, community and organizational matters to the

multicultural and multi-class field of political participation (Arboleda, 2006).

In Ecuador, "equality for women is one of the objectives of the indigenous movement and its organizations. However, gender issues usually are met with varying levels of distrust. A frequent questioning of them is whether they consist of a Westernized entry that is imposed from outsider… Only limited progress has been made on this in the last few years… There is a need to construct a vision of gender matters based in culture and historical realities and life that can sustain the struggles and policy formation. The issues in which indigenous women reaffirm their ethnic identity –such as production and culture- reach greater fluidity than new issues related to equal participation or access to power and government institutions. This ambiguous legitimacy of gender matters among indigenous organizations is reflected in local government and in general it is there that women have been recognized as actors with their own voice and identity. Their incidence is greater and better where there are established spaces for participation. (La equidad para las mujeres aparece como uno de los objetivos del movimiento indígenas y de sus organizaciones, sin embargo los asuntos de género usualmente son recibidos con matices de desconfianza. Un frecuente cuestionamiento a ellos es que si consisten en una entrada occidentalizada e impuesta desde afuera… Los avances son poco relevantes en este tema en los últimos años… Se aprecia la necesidad de construir una visión de los asuntos de género con base en la cultura y las realidades históricas y de vida que puedan sustentar las luchas y la formulación de políticas. Aquellos temas en que las mujeres indígenas reafirman su identidad étnica – como los productivos y los culturales – alcanzan mayor fluidez que los nuevos temas relacionados con la paridad de la participación o el acceso al poder y a la institucionalidad del Estado. " (Arboleda 2006: 211-213)

3.2. Contributing to the Reduction or Reproduction of Inequality: The Cases of Cuenca and Nabón

In this section we analyze two cases with different characteristics. Cuenca and Nabón are districts in the province of Azuay that present very different realities. The first, Cuenca, is more urban while the second is eminently rural.

The purpose of this section is to identify the main structural elements that contribute to the reduction or reproduction of inequality, emphasizing the formal and informal institutions that influence them.

Table 2: Brief Description of the Two Cases

District	Main Characteristics
CUENCA	• Ecuador's third most important city due to its economic potential and geo-political importance. • Population: 417,632 (331,028 of its inhabitants live in urban areas.) • The majority of the population is female (53.18%). • 42% of the population is poor. The three Ecuadorean cities with the largest number of émigrés are Quito (21.5%), Guayaquil (17.6%) and Cuenca (5.8%).
NABÓN	• Mainly rural area located 69 kms from the city of Cuenca. • Population composed of mestizo and Quechua-Cañari groups (35% of the district's population self-identifies as indigenous). • Population: 15,121 inhabitants; only 6.9% live in the urban area. • High level of seasonal migration (80% of men) and permanent migration (8-9% of the population). • The majority of the population is female (54.2%). • Over 90% of the population engages in agricultural livestock production, mainly at the subsistence level. • High incidence of poverty: ninth poorest district in the country (87.9% of the population is poor, 55.7% is indigent). • About 23% of the population is illiterate and on average inhabitants have spent only 3.6 years in school.

Source: Porras (2008).

Table 3: The Case of Cuenca

Factors that Contribute to Inequality	
Cultural Patterns	Rigid division of labour with consequent overload for women.
	High levels of intra-family violence (7 out of every 10 women are victims of physical or psychological abuse).
Access to Assets	Very limited access to resources (property, credit) and services (training, technical assistance).
	Lower incomes for women (They earn 50-60% of what men with similar educational backgrounds earn.)
	Less access to education (only 19.8% of women access higher education as compared to 35.9% of men). This is even more evident if we consider place of residence. Only 4.7% of the university population is from rural areas (1.5%

	women).
	Influence of migration (high percentage of female heads of household).
Factors that Facilitate a Reduction in Inequality	
General Policies and Plans for Equality of Opportunities	Municipal agreement to enforce the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).
	Equality Agreement (2001) Municipal officials committed to policies designed to promote equality.
	Agenda for the district to ensure protection and exercise of women's rights (presented in the **Plan for Equal Opportunities** between Women and Men): PEO 1 (2002-2005) PEO 2 (2006-2020)
	Participatory budgets that are sensitive to the matter of gender.
Local Economic Development (LED)	Emphasis of PEO on work and income generation (focus on women's productive undertakings).
	Discussion Panels on Gender: Employment, Tourism and Microfinance Design and negotiation of public policy directed at eliminating all forms of discrimination on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or social condition in the area of employment and access to productive resources.
Violence	**Decree that establishes policies for preventing and eradicating intra-family violence (2002)** Commitment on the part of the municipality to consider violence as a social, political, public health and citizen security issue.
	Inter-Institutional Network for Preventing and Attending to Intra-Family Violence
	Development of **campaigns on preventing violence**
	Annual review of accounts of the mayor of Cuenca on the actions promoted by the municipality in the area of preventing and eradicating violence.
	Training in the rights of women in various service sectors and providers.
Political Organization and Participation	**Women's Councils** Municipal action aimed at coordinating and strengthening women's social organizations (decision-making regarding PEO).
	Citizen Oversight Commission
	Presence of various groups and sectors which are committed to change in terms of equal opportunities for women.
Education and Cultural Context	**Measures to combat illiteracy**
	Introduction of the **gender approach as part of the curriculum.**
Cultural Context	**Making Memory Visible** (research and historical Publications on illustrious women who contribute to changing imaginaries).
	Woman, Image and Testimonial Competitions
	Workshops for Personal Development and Self-Esteem (geared toward changing women's attitudes and position in society).

Source: Based on Porras (2008).

Table 4: The Case of Nabón

Factors that Contribute to Inequality	
Cultural Patterns	Socio-cultural barriers, resistance to including a vision of gender on the part of the municipality.
	Undervaluation of women's work.
Access to Assets	In a context of generalized poverty, fewer opportunities for women especially in terms of income, employment, education and access to/ control of productive resources.
	Over-exploitation of women's work because women assume productive and marketing roles due to male migration.
Organization and Political Participation	Lack of political organizations for women.
	The Women's Commission (1998) does not work.
	Lack of organization of women around their specific demands. The organizations reproduce the roles that are socially assigned to women such as health, education and elder care.
Violence	The violence that affects women is made invisible and there is a lack of specific actions for preventing/ eradicating it.
Elements that Facilitate a Reduction in Inequality	
Public Management	**Presence of women in key roles** of the Council (mayors and assistant mayors) and the Executive (60% of the professionals who work in the municipality are women, and 3 of 5 leadership roles are held by women).
	Continuity of management and cohesion of female public officials.
General Policies and Plans on Equal Opportunities (including LED)	**Nabón Plan 1996–2006** (Project with COSUDE) Improvement of productive conditions, natural resource management, organizational and institutional strengthening (with support for the participatory design of development plans). Proposal focused on local economic development without losing sight of a more comprehensive vision.
	Strategic Development Plan for the District (1999, 2006) Prioritizing key points for women such as: • Childhood and adolescence • Development of human capacities • Education • Conservation of natural resources • Production and employment • Infrastructure and services

	Participatory budgets with positive discrimination in favour of women, children, senior citizens and the poor.
	Inter-institutional planning and cooperation with public/private participation.
	Development with women's participation (approximately 60% of all participants in the various activities): supply, production, credit and savings banks.
	Overcoming client-based management forms, favouring transparency and citizen participation.
Political participation and organization	**Community action plan**
	Obtaining legal status of women's organizations with responsibility in the execution of projects.
	Participatory model of designing and managing the Nabón Plan (from the community).
Education-Capacity building	**Creation of local technical teams**
	Center for Training Human Talent
	Community and Connectivity Project
	A set of actions aimed at strengthening women's self-esteem.

Sources: Developed by the authors based on Porras (2008) and Herrera (2008).

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above analysis, we have developed a set of conclusions and recommendations that address issues that have emerged as constants above and beyond the case example, acquiring relevance for LAC and especially for the local/rural contexts that have been the main focus of this article.

1.   Overcoming the distance between the formal aspects of legislation and planning and the real practice of public management oriented towards equality of opportunities.
Researchers have detected a high level of concern for normative, formal and instrumental aspects of political participation in Latin America. The region has seen significant production of norms, decrees, plans and participatory budgets with a focus on

gender and ad hoc instances (committees, councils, boards, etc.). In many cases, we have arrived at a certain "rituality" of women's political participation but have not had a major impact in real life.

This stage –which has been key for positioning the issue at hand- should be enriched in the future through specific initiatives based on best practices and more operational tools adapted to each context that help bring about real and lasting change. In this sense, it seems important to focus on local processes –rather than specific projects for strengthening women's participation and gender institutionalism- which:

- Show legitimacy and recognition of public management and managers by citizens and women in particular.
- Reveal public/private inter-institutional coordination at the territorial level that is committed to the gender approach, ensuring that the issue is not limited by small groups or associations that are often not linked to women.[12]
- Make connections between national/local norms/laws (including the signing of international agreements and accords) with viable local ones that make sense for the local population.
- Look to give continuity to policies and investments in the medium- and long-terms.
- Institutionally strengthen local governments and the local political community so that development processes are inclusive, sustainable and linked to the territory.

2. Addressing women's participation as one of the broadest axes with a territorial focus.

It is evident that women –especially indigenous women and campesinas- have demands and in some cases agendas that are very much linked to local economic development, particularly at the rural level. While moving the border of formal representation and political participation –at the national and local levels- has been key for traditionally marginalized populations, there is a need to address territorial development programs that:

- Attack all aspects of the issues that affect equality of opportunities and women's political participation.
- Go beyond a restrictive vision of poverty as a simple lack in order to address it

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[12] The challenge of achieving greater political participation among women cannot only be assumed by municipal women's associations or a specific group/party, or by NGOs or specific public institutions. This is a matter of working in networks and coalitions with a greater capacity to contribute to change.

from the point of view of the valorisation and coordination of existing local assets.
- Coordinate specific and simultaneous actions in three fields: political participation, social inclusion and economic development.
- Address the "cultural identities" present within a territory as a possible catalyzing axis for territorial valorisation with women as leaders (Ranaboldo and Schejtman, 2008), which also will contribute to the dismantling of conservative cultural patterns.

3.   To present new approaches to and tools for capacity building

The past few decades have generated multiple, diverse activities aimed at raising awareness, training and educating people regarding the issue of gender. LAC currently has many initiatives that are designed to formalize leadership and political training schools for women.

While there is no quali-quantitative global analysis regarding all of these processes, there is sufficient evidence[13] that continuing this logic will not ensure the creation of an innovative critical mass that is capable of addressing the issue of political participation in all of its facets, particularly at the local level and with rural men and women. It is therefore important to rethink training processes that are aimed at:
- Strengthening technical and political capacities, the latter of which should not be limited to ideology.
- Investing in renewed young leaderships that help revert the phenomena of caudillismo and concentration of power that are also part of women's associations.
- Integrating men and agencies other than women's organizations, seeking out new synergies.
- Learning from life and local experiences through processes that combine practical experience, knowledge and analysis.[14]
- Coordinating sustained and recognized processes of educational and training public policies from different countries.

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[13] See, for example, the reflections led by UN-INSTRAW based on the Project for Strengthening Governance from a Gender Perspective and Women's Political Participation at the Local Level in Latin America. www.un-instraw.org/es/ggpp/general/genero-gobernabilidad-y-participacion-politica-de-las-mu.html
[14] This is the case of the Learning Routes promoted by UN-INSTRAW and PROCASUR (www.procasur.org).

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