

2008

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Bluebook Citation

Egle Iturbe de Blanco, *Women: Power and Development in Latin America*, 5 U. St. Thomas L.J. 675 (2008).

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ARTICLE

WOMEN: POWER AND DEVELOPMENT IN LATIN AMERICA*

EGLÉ ITURBE DE BLANCO**

I. INTRODUCTION

At the present time, there is a clear recognition in the international arena that development is not possible without fairness, and that there is no fairness when half of the population—namely women—is denied an equal opportunity to contribute to the economic, political, social and cultural development of their countries. Some studies indicate that “poverty wears the face of a woman” because of their low participation in economic affairs, unequal pay for equal work, and in many countries, the denial of opportunities for training and education to enter more lucrative professions. Some indicators for Latin America show, for example, that the rate of participation of women in economic activities in urban areas was about 50% in 1999. In addition, while women constitute the heads of 37% of households, average salary for a woman with more than thirteen years of education remains 24% lower than that earned by men.¹

Despite these facts, women have made considerable progress in the last quarter century; they increasingly participate in economic affairs and mechanisms aimed at reducing inequality and discrimination have been adopted both domestically and internationally.² The third of the Millennium Development Goals³ refers to “promot[ing] gender equality” and acknowl-

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1. U.N. Econ. Comm. for Latin America & the Caribbean [ECLAC], *Millennium Development Goals, 2006: A Look at Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Dec. 2007).

2. Perhaps the greatest push came from the adoption of the Millennium Declaration and Development Goals adopted by all the countries of the United Nations in 2000.

3. United Nations Millennium Declaration, G.A. Res. 55/2, at 5, U.N. Doc. A/RES/55/2 (Sept. 18, 2000).

edges the unequal treatment of women and the denial of equal opportunity at every level throughout the world.⁴

As a result of these goals, progress in education has accelerated. Primary education has achieved parity and women are frequently a majority of the student population in secondary and higher educational institutions.⁵ However, this achievement alone is not enough. Women will only be able to profit from this educational progress if they are simultaneously given the opportunity to engage in income-producing activities and to play an important role in the development of public policies that stimulate development.

The question thus becomes whether bringing more women into government cabinet positions in the region will be enough to make a difference in the policies aimed at including women in productive, well-remunerated economic activities. Based on the personal experiences of the women who first participated in groups dedicated to defining economic and social policy for Latin America and creating more equitable spaces of power, the author⁶ of this article has explored and researched this subject over many years. Thus far, the presence of more women in government cabinets has not translated into more power for them. The existing administrative, judicial, economic and political structures, as well as cultural patterns, make it very difficult for women to penetrate most spheres of public power.

In spite of these hurdles, two women—Michele Bachelet in Chile and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in Argentina—have reached the presidency in their respective countries. Latin America now watches these two women to observe whether the changes necessary to reduce discrimination, improve equitable treatment and foster growth in a socially just manner will take root during their terms in office.

The following pages analyze the expanding role of Latin American women in decision-making; the qualitative changes in the positions of responsibility entrusted to them, which have shifted from social services to the economic realm; and the challenges and opportunities that this elite group of women encountered as they attempted to work their way into the traditional patriarchal centers of power.

4. *Id.* at Goal 3, Target 4, Indicators 9–11. Goal 3 is to promote gender equality and empower women.

5. ECLAC, *supra* note 1, at 28–32.

6. The author has been working on this matter since 1998 in Venezuela with *Fundación Integración y Desarrollo (FID)* [Foundation for Integration and Development], which researches public administration in the economic and social sectors. Between 2000 and 2007, with the support of the Interamerican Development Bank, she conducted research related to Public Administration and Governability in twelve Latin American countries with special emphasis on women in government ministry positions. This research provided the background for this paper and the documents and analysis cited in the footnotes herein.

II. INCREASING PARTICIPATION OF LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN IN GOVERNMENT

Since the second half of the last century, democratic progress in Latin America has facilitated the admission of women into government cabinets.⁷ Democracy has brought increased opportunities for training and access to university and technical education for women, as well as increased political participation.⁸ The strengthening of democracy in the region, the action of the United Nations, and the international recognition of the rights of women have provided the domestic context for issues of concern to women.⁹ These initiatives aimed to attain equitable treatment of women, enhance the protection of human rights, and eliminate obstacles that hamper the full participation of women in public and private affairs.

Despite the dramatic increase of women in politics in recent years and the fact that slightly more than one-fifth of the female-headed government ministries in the world are in the Americas, currently only around 12% come from Latin American countries.¹⁰ In January of 2008, there were eighty-six women ministers in office among the nineteen Latin American countries, which represents 23% of all the ministers in office and 20% of the 426 women ministers appointed since the first woman was nominated in 1944.¹¹ Seven countries (Ecuador, Panama, Chile, Cuba, Venezuela, Colombia, and Costa Rica) pioneered this process with Ecuador appointing a woman in 1944 and the other countries following suit in the 1950s.¹² Six more countries (Honduras, Dominican Republic, Uruguay, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Guatemala) joined them between 1960 and 1980, with the remaining countries (Mexico, Brazil, Peru, Paraguay, Argentina, and El Salvador) coming on board between 1980 and 1989.¹³

The process of appointing women to office has been uneven in the region: Colombia and Venezuela have been the most daring, appointing over forty women to ministry positions,¹⁴ although this trend has changed in Venezuela in this century.¹⁵ Colombia, on the other hand, has continued on this path and remains the only country in the region that has enacted

7. Worldwide Guide to Women in Leadership, *First Female Ministers*, <http://www.guide2womenleaders.com/First-female-ministers.htm> (last visited Nov. 23, 2008).

8. Mujeres Latinoamericanas en Cifras [Latin American Women in Numbers], www.eurosur.org/FLACSO/mujeres (last visited Nov. 24, 2008).

9. The Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 adopted the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action.

10. EGLÉ ITURBE DE BLANCO, *LAS MUJERES LATINOAMERICANAS EN LA ALTA GESTIÓN PÚBLICA: LOGROS Y DESAFÍOS 2* (Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo 2003) [hereinafter *LAS MUJERES LATINOAMERICANAS EN LA ALTA GESTIÓN PÚBLICA*].

11. *See infra* tbl.1.

12. *See LAS MUJERES LATINOAMERICANAS EN LA ALTA GESTIÓN PÚBLICA, supra* note 10, at 4.

13. *Id.*

14. *Id.* at 5.

15. *Id. See infra* tbl.1.

legislation guaranteeing the participation of women at all levels of government.¹⁶

In Central America, Costa Rica and Honduras have led the process of integrating women into their cabinets.¹⁷ Costa Rica first appointed a woman in 1958, Honduras in 1965, and Nicaragua even elected a female to the presidency in 1990 and appointed 59% of the ministers between 2000 and 2007. Panama appointed the first woman in 1950 and has maintained a good level of representation with twenty-four female ministers and one woman President of the Republic, Mireya Moscoso, between 1999 and 2004. As the late-comer in the group, El Salvador only began appointing female ministers toward the end of the 1980s; they have since appointed a total of ten women, 40% in the last eight years.¹⁸

*Table 1: The Number of Women Government Ministers in Latin America from 1944 to 2007*¹⁹

Country	1944-1984	1985-1999	2000-2007	1944-2007 Cumulative	December 2007
1. Argentina	0	4	9	13	3
2. Brazil	1	6	6	13	3
3. Bolivia	4	5	16	25	5
4. Colombia	7	24	16	47	4
5. Chile	5	3	19	27	8
6. Cuba	13	0	4	17	4
7. Costa Rica	9	9	15	33	6
8. Ecuador	3	12	17	32	10
9. El Salvador	1	5	4	10	4
10. Guatemala	4	12	6	22	3
11. Honduras	3	8	9	20	5
12. Mexico	2	6	8	16	3
13. Nicaragua	3	6	13	22	5
14. Panama	5	11	8	24	5
15. Paraguay	0	3	3	6	2
16. Peru	0	13	16	29	4
17. Dominican Republic	5	5	6	16	3
18. Uruguay	3	1	5	9	3
19. Venezuela	13	16	16	45	6
TOTAL	81	149	196	426	86

Three Andean countries (Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador) have also appointed more than twenty women to government positions, more than half

16. EL CAMINO HACIA EL PODER: MINISTRAS LATINOAMERICANAS 1950-2007 (Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo 2008).

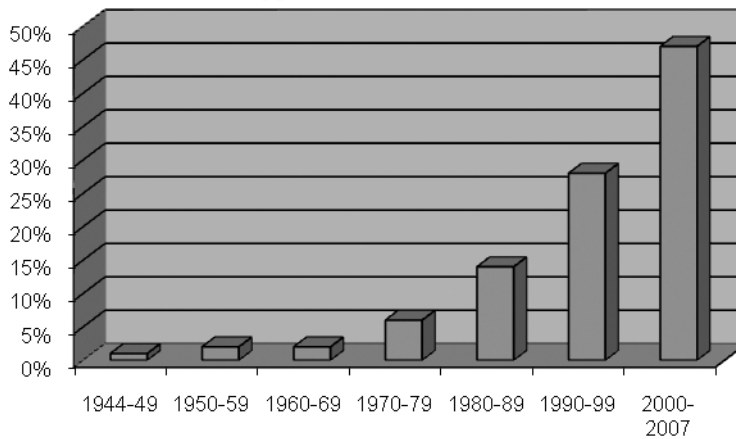
17. *See infra* tbl.1.

18. *Id.*

19. LAS MUJERES LATINOAMERICANAS EN LA ALTA GESTIÓN PÚBLICA, *supra* note 10, at 7 tbl.5 (data updated and compiled by author for 2007).

in the last eight years.²⁰ Two of these countries pioneered the process: Ecuador appointed the first female minister in 1944 and Chile did so in 1952,²¹ although Chile waited more than thirty years to appoint another female to a ministry position. Chile is now making rapid progress and has appointed twenty-seven women as ministers²² and currently has a woman occupying the Presidency of the Republic. Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil (the three largest countries in Latin America), however, are among those that started the process rather late (only in the 1980s) and have appointed fewer than sixteen female ministers each, more than 50% in the present century.²³ Figure 1 illustrates an uninterrupted and exponential increase in the appointment of women to cabinet positions: Latin America appointed 80.8% of all female ministers in the last twenty-five years.

Figure 1: Increase in the Appointment of Women Government Ministers²⁴



Not only has there been a quantitative increase in the number of women at the ministerial level, but there has also been an important qualitative change in the type of positions to which women are currently being appointed in comparison with the past.²⁵ Until five years ago, countries appointed most females (over 50%) to head cabinet ministry offices in the area of social services (such as education, welfare, health, youth and the family)—services traditionally regarded as areas of concern to women. This trend, however, is changing as women have progressed into areas regarded as more difficult and complex, such as the economy, finance, defense, planning, the presidency, and foreign affairs. The balance in the inclusion of

20. *Id. See supra* tbl.1.

21. LAS MUJERES LATINOAMERICANAS EN LA ALTA GESTIÓN PÚBLICA, *supra* note 10, at 4.

22. *Id. See supra* tbl.1.

23. *Id.*

24. Percentage computed from the total number of women government ministers appointed in Latin America 1944–2007. Data compiled and processed by Eglé Iturbe and Elba Luna at the IDB, 2007.

25. *See infra* tbl.2 and note 27.

women in cabinet ministry positions had noticeably improved by the beginning of 2008 with increased proportional representation in areas of the economy and administration.

*Table 2: Latin American Ministers in Terms of Area of Responsibility from 1944 to January 2008*²⁶

Office	Until 2002		In January 2008	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Social Services Ministries	165	50.8	33	38.4
The Economy and Infrastructure	86	26.4	26	30.2
Inner Cabinet Ministries	74	22.8	27	31.4
Total	325	100.0	86	100.0

As of January 2008, both Argentina and Uruguay had female ministers of defense,²⁷ and in 2006 and 2007, women served in that capacity in Chile, Ecuador, and Colombia.²⁸ In total, ten women have served as defense ministers in the region, nine of them appointed in this century, representing 19% of the women defense ministers appointed in the world.²⁹

In 2003, Ecuador appointed an ethnic Quechuan woman to the position of *Canciller* (foreign affairs minister).³⁰ Eight other countries—Argentina, Colombia, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Paraguay, and the Dominican Republic³¹—have also appointed thirteen women as ministers of foreign affairs, one of the ministries with the highest visibility. Colombia did so first, appointing four women to this position.³² The number of Latin American women who have become foreign affairs ministers represents 10% of the total worldwide.³³ At present, Ecuador, Mexico, and El Salvador all have female foreign affairs ministers.³⁴

Including minister of planning, sixteen Latin American countries have appointed twenty-seven women as ministers of finance and economics, representing 12% of the women serving in these positions worldwide.³⁵ Vene-

26. LAS MUJERES LATINOAMERICANAS EN LA ALTA GESTIÓN PÚBLICA, *supra* note 10 (data updated and compiled by author for 2008 using: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html> and <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/world-leaders-1/index.html>).

27. CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, CHIEFS OF STATE AND CABINET MEMBERS OF FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/world-leaders-1/index.html> (last visited Nov. 23, 2008).

28. Worldwide Guide to Women in Leadership, *supra* note 7.

29. *Id.*

30. *Id.*

31. *Id.*

32. *Id.*

33. *See infra* tbl.3.

34. CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, *supra* note 27.

35. Worldwide Guide to Women in Leadership, *supra* note 7; *see infra* tbl.3.

zuela appointed the first woman to head a finance ministry in 1989.³⁶ By January of 2008, Ecuador, El Salvador, Cuba, and Honduras had female ministers of finance and economics.

Even more important than these positions is the presence of women in the presidency of central banks. Eleven women have occupied this position in nine countries during the last twenty-five years, the first one in Guatemala in 1992.³⁷ Honduras has had three female central bank presidents. Currently, women occupy that position in El Salvador and Guatemala.³⁸

Table 3: Women Ministers of Finance, Defense and Foreign Affairs³⁹

Women Ministers of Finance and Economy		
Worldwide	232	
Latin America	27	11.6%
Women Ministers of Defense		
Worldwide	53	
Latin America	10	18.9%
Women Foreign Ministers		
Worldwide	119	
Latin America	12	10.0%
Women Presidents of Central Banks		
Worldwide	38	
Latin America	11	29.0%

As depicted in Table 4, with a few exceptions, the Latin American countries experience considerable instability at the highest echelons of government officials, which has a direct impact on the efficiency of public policymaking and economic development.⁴⁰ In general, with the exception of Cuba, there is a high turnover rate among government ministers. The average tenure for a government minister is around twenty months and women average twenty-eight months.⁴¹ Of the female ministers, 44% served only one year or less and 24% served for up to two years.⁴² This statistic means that, on average, 70% of the women failed to serve even one-half of the constitutional term; only fifteen female ministers (7% of those sampled) remained in office for five years or longer.⁴³

36. Eglé Iturbe de Blanco was appointed to the ministry in 1989, and a second woman, Maritza Izaguirre, was appointed ten years later.

37. LAS MUJERES LATINOAMERICANAS EN LA ALTA GESTIÓN PÚBLICA, *supra* note 10.

38. CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, *supra* note 27.

39. Worldwide Guide to Women in Leadership, *supra* note 7.

40. Eglé Iturbe de Blanco, *Experiencias de Mujeres Latinoamericanas en los Gabinetes de Gobierno* [The Experience of Latin American Women in Government Cabinets], IX Congreso Internacional del CLAD (2004) (Spain), available at <http://www.clad.org.ve/fulltext/0050135.pdf>.

41. *Id.*

42. *Id.*

43. LAS MUJERES LATINOAMERICANAS EN LA ALTA GESTIÓN PÚBLICA, *supra* note 10, at 63–72.

The reality of these statistics affect the ability of Latin American governments to follow through on specific policies—it explains the drastic changes of direction in economic policy and the lack of continuity in the area of social policy. These consequences undermine the efficacy of governments' ability to address social problems. These problems cannot be solved through short-term policies—they require sustained commitment over time. Although the results are not readily apparent, as they are in the areas of education and health, we must address this instability if we are to achieve sustainable development and social justice.

*Table 4: Average Tenure of Ministers Per Country from 1944 to 2003
(Average Number of Months in Office)⁴⁴*

Up to 24 months	25 to 36 months	37 to 48 months	Over 48 months
Argentina (15) Bolivia (17) Colombia (19) El Salvador (18) Paraguay (24) Peru (15) Venezuela (23)	Brazil (24) Ecuador (30) Guatemala (25) Dominican Republic (30) Mexico (33) Panamá (32)	Chile (39) Costa Rica (42) Honduras (48) Nicaragua (42) Uruguay (37)	Cuba (100)

Despite the small but growing number of female ministers, many women are stepping into second and third levels of responsibility in public administration.⁴⁵ This movement creates a reservoir of talented women ready to progress in greater numbers into positions of power at the highest levels of decision-making in Latin America. Moreover, a significant number of women head decentralized government agencies and manage government-owned companies.

In other areas, such as the judiciary, women comprise a large proportion of judges in the country; in countries such as Honduras, half of the justices on the Supreme Court are women lawyers.⁴⁶ In Venezuela, women head the Supreme Tribunal of Justice, the Attorney General's Office, and the Supreme Electoral Council.⁴⁷ Venezuela also forged a new path in this area in 1990 when it appointed the first female chief justice of an interna-

44. *Id.*

45. Worldwide Guide to Women in Leadership, *supra* note 7.

46. Poder Judicial de Honduras, *Integrantes de La Corte Suprema de Justicia* [Members of the Supreme Court of Justice], <http://www.poderjudicial.gob.hn/ejes/CSJ/Integrantes/> (last visited Oct. 6, 2008).

47. Tribunal Supremo de Justicia, *Junta Directiva Tribunal Supremo de Justicia* [Board of the Supreme Court of Justice], <http://www.tsj.gov.ve/eltribunal/juntadirec.shtml> (last visited Oct. 6, 2008); Ministerio Público, *Fiscal General de la República* [Attorney General of the Republic], <http://www.fiscalia.gov.ve/fiscal.asp> (last visited Oct. 8, 2008); Consejo Nacional Electoral de Venezuela, *Directiva del Consejo Nacional Electoral* [National Electoral Council Directorate], <http://www.cne.gov.ve/perfiles.php> (last visited Oct. 6, 2008).

tional court: The Andean Court of Justice of the Andean Community of Nations (Cartagena Agreement).⁴⁸

The limited but growing participation of women in top positions of the executive branch is reflected in the political arena as well, where the situation is similarly beginning to change—probably even faster and with more visibility than in the area of public administration. According to a 2006 study conducted by the Inter-American Dialogue, between 2000 and 2006, the percentage of female representatives in the lower houses of national legislative bodies in Latin America increased from an average of fourteen to nineteen.⁴⁹ By 2006, there were 375 women representatives in the lower houses of national congresses, which is equivalent to 12% of women representatives worldwide after the Nordic countries (36.4%) and Asia (13.1%).⁵⁰

In its website database, the Parliamentary Union indicates a 36% growth in the number of women parliamentarians around the world between 2000 and 2006.⁵¹ Another study, shown below, evaluates the advance of democracy in the last sixty-five years through the increased number of national legislative bodies in the world and the increased participation of female representatives in those parliaments—a four-fold increase in that time. In 1945, only 3% of the representatives and 2.2% of the senators worldwide were women, but by 1985, these averages had increased to 11.6% and 9.4% respectively.⁵² In 2007, thirty-five women led their national parliaments, one of them in Venezuela.⁵³

The situation is similar in terms of participation in the leadership of political parties. Among 418 political parties included in a sample for a study conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, only forty-five women were identified as president or first secretary of a party (10.8% of the total), thirty-one women headed parliamentary blocs in eighty-six countries (7.7%), and thirty-four women were spokespersons for their parties in eighty-five countries (8.8%).⁵⁴ Given the low participation of women in the leadership of political parties, it follows that their election to national par-

48. Carmen Elena Crespo de Hernández, a Venezuelan woman and Doctor of Law, has also been a Chair of the Judicial Administration Section of the Inter-American Bar Association (1994–2005), Substitute Judge in the Criminal Division of the Supreme Court of Venezuela (1984–89), Justice of the Judicial Council (1979–89), Criminal Judge of First Instance and Appeal (1975–79), and a Public Defender (1960–66).

49. INTER-AMERICAN DIALOGUE, *WOMEN IN THE AMERICAS: PATH TO POLITICAL POWER* (2008), <http://www.thedialogue.org/page.cfm?pageID=32&pubID=1160>.

50. Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Statistical Archive: Women in National Parliaments*, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world-arc.htm> (last visited Nov. 23, 2008).

51. *Id.*

52. INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION [IPU], *MEN AND WOMEN IN POLITICS: DEMOCRACY STILL IN THE MAKING* 83 (1997).

53. See *Experiencias de Mujeres Latinoamericanas en los Gabinetes de Gobierno*, *supra* note 40.

54. IPU, *supra* note 52, at 14–15.

liaments and other institutions of political power is low as well, despite the policy of “quotas” that has taken root in recent decades, which favors the inclusion of women in those positions.⁵⁵ As a result, their ability to generate changes in the policymaking process is so limited.

Table 5: Women in National Parliaments from 1945 to 1995⁵⁶

There has been a six-fold increase in the number of sovereign states with National Parliaments	
The number of women parliamentarians has increased four-fold	
1945	26 National Parliaments 3% Women in Lower Houses 2.2% Women Senators
1965	94 Parliaments 8.1% Women in Lower Houses 9.3% Women Senators
1995	176 Parliaments 11.6% Women in Lower Houses 9.4% Women Senators
1993–95	12.9% Regional average in the Americas for Unicameral National Parliaments or Popular Chambers and 19% for 2007
Women serving in national parliaments worldwide (%)	
Europe	12.6
Africa	10.4
Asia	13.1
Americas	12.7
Pacific	11.6

The adoption of quotas to guarantee the inclusion of women in national parliaments began in 1991.⁵⁷ Argentina initiated this trend, and now it has the highest percentage of women national legislators (33.3% in 2001).⁵⁸ This mechanism has spread throughout the region, and fourteen countries have adopted similar measures with varying results.⁵⁹ While it appears that the adoption of quotas produced an increase of 30% in the number of women parliamentarians in Argentina, the results for Mexico and Venezuela may have been less than 2% growth.⁶⁰

55. Elba Luna et al., *El Camino Hacia el Poder: Ministras Latinoamericanas: 1950–2007* [The Road to Power: Latin American Women Ministers: 1950–2007], available at <http://idbdocs.iadb.org/wsdocs/getdocument.aspx?docnum=1415084>.

56. IPU, *supra* note 52, at 83 (data updated and compiled by author for 2007).

57. INTER-AMERICAN DIALOGUE, *supra* note 49.

58. *Id.*

59. *Id.*

60. *Id.*

Table 6: Legislated Quotas and Gender Breakdown for Lower Houses in Twelve Countries in Latin America in 2007⁶¹

Country	Year Implemented	Minimum Quota Mandated by Law	Specific Placement on Electoral List***	Type of List on Ballot***
Argentina	1991	30%	Yes	Closed
Costa Rica	1997/2000	40%	Yes	Closed
Peru	1997	25%	No	Open
Dominican Rep.	1997	25%	No	Closed
Mexico	1996	30%	No	Closed
Ecuador	1997/2000	20%/30%	Yes	Open
Bolivia	1997	30%	Yes	Closed
Colombia*	2000	30%	No	Closed
Panama	1997	30%	No	Open
Venezuela**	1997	30%	No	Closed
Brazil	1997	30%	No	Open
Paraguay	1996	20%	Yes	Closed

* The quota mandates apply to administrative positions.

** Quota later rescinded.

***Columns 4 and 5 refer to the lists that political parties use to select candidates for parliamentary office.

Women are increasingly visible in the Americas as they endeavor to reach the highest political offices in their countries. As shown in Table 7, there have been seven female presidents in Latin America. Two of them are in office at the present time: Michele Bachelet in Chile and Cristina Fernandez in Argentina. Recently, Lourdes Flores came very close to winning the presidency of Peru, and candidate Cintia Viteri in Ecuador did well in the 2006 presidential elections in her respective country.⁶² Venezuela and Peru have elevated women to the highest appointed executive positions in government. The former appointed a female vice president (Adina Bastidas) and Peru appointed a female prime minister (Beatriz Merino). Currently, Peru, Costa Rica and El Salvador have women vice-president-elects.⁶³

Participation of women in high positions of the executive branch does not correspond with an increase in their participation in the political arena as a whole. Argentina, for example, only has a few women at the ministerial level, but it has the highest number of women in its national Congress and a

61. IPU, *supra* note 52; *see also* INTER-AMERICAN DIALOGUE, *supra* note 49.

62. *See* International Foundation for Electoral Systems [IFES], *IFES Election Guide - Election Profile for Peru - Results*, <http://www.electionguide.org/results.php?ID=994> (last visited Sept. 27, 2008); IFES, *IFES Election Guide - Election Profile for Ecuador - Results*, <http://www.electionguide.org/results.php?ID=1012> (last visited Sept. 27, 2008).

63. CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, *supra* note 27.

female President.⁶⁴ Mexico, on the other hand, has a high number of women in local government and in the higher echelons of political parties, but only under the current administration has it gone beyond just four women in the Cabinet.⁶⁵

Table 7: Women Presidents in Latin America from 1970 to 2008⁶⁶

Country	President	Date	Comments
Argentina	Isabel Martínez de Perón	1974–76	Vice-president of the Republic and assumed office on the death of her husband, Juan Domingo Perón; overthrown in a military coup.
Bolivia	Lidia Gueiler	1979–80	President of the Chamber of Deputies at the time the Parliament elected her as Interim President after a popular revolt; lasted eight months in office.
Nicaragua	Violeta Chamorro	1990–97	Elected President to replace the Sandinista administration of Daniel Ortega.
Ecuador	Rosalía Arteaga	1997	President of the National Congress when President Abdala Bucaran was overthrown, under whom she served as Vice-President; tenure lasted two days, due to Congressional opposition.
Panama	Mireya Moscoso	1999–2004	Widow of three-time President of the Republic, Arnulfo Arias.
Chile	Michele Bachelet	2006–10	Elected in 2006 by the <i>Partidos de la Concertación</i> (Parties for Concerted Action) in Chile. Previously, had been minister of health and minister of defense during the administration of President Ricardo Lagos; exiled during the rule of Augusto Pinochet.
Argentina	Cristina Fernández De Kirchner	2007–11	Wife of departing President Nestor Kirchner and former senator.

The low number of women in positions of power is mirrored in multi-lateral organizations. A study conducted by the Inter-American Dialogue shows that the participation of women on the boards of the multilateral organizations headquartered in Washington, D.C. varies between 4% and 12%.⁶⁷ Those institutions had only fifteen women at the three highest levels of staffing in 2003,⁶⁸ which represents between 17% and 21% of management positions. Although it began recently, the growing participation of women in these institutions is now accelerating. For example, at the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the participation of women on its board went from 15% in 2001 to 21% in 2002–2003. At the World Bank, this increase went from 18% to 21%, while the Interamerican Development

64. IPU, *supra* note 52.

65. LAS MUJERES LATINOAMERICANAS EN LA ALTA GESTIÓN PÚBLICA, *supra* note 10, at 7 tbl.5.

66. Eglé Iturbe de Blanco, *Compilation of Research on Political Administration among Latin American Countries*, (2007) (unpublished research, on file with author).

67. INTER-AMERICAN DIALOGUE, *supra* note 49, at 10.

68. *Id.* at 9.

Bank (IDB) saw a decrease from 18% to 17% participation during the same period. These organizations are going through a process of restructuring and realignment, which will certainly affect the above figures in one way or another, although it is too soon to know exactly how.⁶⁹

III. FACTORS INFLUENCING THE RAPID GROWTH OF FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT CABINETS

Several factors have contributed to the increased participation of women making political decisions in the public arena. Although each country has unique reasons for this increase, the following generalizations influenced the growth of women participating in government in most countries:

1. A stronger democratic process has resulted in higher inclusion and participation
2. Increased training and technological knowledge among women
3. Wider political participation as a result of democracy
4. Increased social conscience regarding the role of women and their contributions, not only to the family but to society
5. In most countries, a legal framework that favors the participation of women
6. Higher earnings and acceptance of women's new responsibilities, both by their families and their partners
7. International pressure, especially through the United Nations, to promote equitable treatment and reduce gender discrimination

To gain an understanding of the factors that have stimulated the growing participation of women in high-level positions of executive power during the period of 2002 to 2007, the IDB consulted with women who were currently holding or had recently held ministerial positions. The IDB hoped to learn from the personal experiences of these women what factors had led them to their appointment and what hurdles, if any, they had encountered in trying to discharge their responsibilities.⁷⁰

The IDB's first project consisted of a questionnaire sent by e-mail to thirty women in 2002; sixteen women from eight different countries answered the questionnaire.⁷¹ For the second project, the IDB held a meeting of current and former female ministers in September 2003 at the IDB headquarters in Washington, D.C.; twenty women from nineteen countries attended.⁷² The third project involved interviews with sixty-one women for a

69. *Id.*

70. Eglé Iturbe de Blanco, *supra* note 66.

71. Eglé Iturbe de Blanco, *Capacitación de Altos Directivos Públicos, con Énfasis en Género* [Training for High Office in Public Administration, with Emphasis on Gender], (2002) (unpublished manuscript, of file with author).

72. Eglé Iturbe de Blanco, *Reunión de Ministras Latinoamericanas: Informe Final y Discusiones en las Mesas de Trabajo* [Meeting of Latin American Women Ministers: Final Report and Workshop Discussions], (Sept., 2003) (unpublished manuscript, on file with author).

research project on public administration and governability conducted in twelve countries,⁷³ including ten ministers who had already been interviewed in Venezuela.⁷⁴ The experiences of these women allow us to draw the following conclusions.

First, the women who have reached ministerial positions in the region constitute a political or technocratic elite, and their experience cannot in any way compare with the struggle for justice and non-discrimination that is being waged by women on several fronts.

Second, none of the women who participated in the above events believed that she had encountered discrimination in her quest to attain her government ministry position or in the discharge of her responsibilities. The women did, however, discuss the strong challenges they had faced as they attempted to work effectively and participate actively in key decisions. The most salient challenges they faced were: (a) the repeated need to prove that they were more capable than men in similar positions; (b) the need to balance their personal lives with their public responsibilities; and (c) the need to earn respect—to be considered on par with the male ministers in collective decision-making.

Third, practically all of the women who participated in these studies stated that in the area of ministerial responsibilities, both genders are supposed to perform the same tasks; there is no differentiation of responsibilities. Nevertheless, there are actual differences stemming from the presumption that women, in general, are not qualified to assume these responsibilities and they are consequently subjected to constant “testing.” In other words, they need to demonstrate that they know the task at hand and know how to manage it. This situation adds another layer to their responsibilities that is not faced by their male colleagues in government cabinets.

Fourth, two-thirds of the women interviewed for the study singled out their professional training, experience and technical knowledge, along with their political engagement, as the determining factors for their appointment to ministerial positions. Indeed, in our sample of the participants, we discovered the following facts:

1. Seventy percent of the women interviewed held a university degree. Some had two degrees and 30% were highly specialized, having a master’s or doctorate degree. Economics predominates among the areas of specialization (36%), followed by education

73. Eglé Iturbe de Blanco, *Estudios de Gestión Pública y Gobernabilidad para Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, México, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Perú y República Dominicana* [Studies of Public Management and Governance for Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru and the Dominican Republic], (2008) (unpublished manuscript, on file with author).

74. Fundación Integración y Desarrollo, *Capacidad de Gestión del Estado: Experiencias de Gestión Pública en el Área Económica, Ensayo No. 1* [Ability to Manage the State: Experiences in the Economic Area: Foundation for Integration and Development, Test No. 1] (1998) (Venez.).

- (15%) and law and sociology sharing third place (each with 7%) with the balance spread among six or seven other areas of study.
2. Fifty-nine percent had experience in the public sector before being appointed to a cabinet position; some had been career public servants before moving into managerial positions, while others had entered government service directly to manage public institutions or government-owned companies. Several had been ambassadors, representing their countries abroad. 58% had prior experience in private organizations, especially in international organizations. Many of the women had held important positions at the United Nations and in various NGOs. Some of the women had been top executives in industrial companies, and one of them had been crowned Miss Universe⁷⁵ before her term as governor, mayor and presidential candidate.
 3. Forty-seven percent of the participants had prior involvement in political activities. At least ten of them had held elected office as representatives, senators, governors, and mayors. In addition, three of them had presided over the national congress and the lower house in their countries. Three of these women have been presidential candidates and are respected political leaders. Others were politically active or had been members of a team of technical advisers to other presidential candidates, which had placed them in line to be appointed to a cabinet post or other significant office.
 4. Fifty percent of the women interviewed had also pursued academic careers, especially those from Costa Rica, Chile, and the Dominican Republic.
 5. Along with professional education and political experience, the women mentioned personal attributes as other important factors that led to their appointment to ministerial posts. Those attributes regarded as most influential related to positive features of their personalities: the ability to resolve conflicts and deal with personnel, managerial abilities, a commitment to the task at hand, and honesty.
 6. Striking the proper balance between personal life and serving in a higher public office is a constant preoccupation for women in ministerial positions. Their experiences varied considerably in this area depending on their individual situation, the cultural attitudes of their country regarding the role of women in society, the composition of their household (especially with regard to their partner or children), and how each woman viewed her responsibility to

75. Irene Sáez Conde was Miss Universe in 1991; she served as Mayor of Chacao for two terms (1990–96), one of the most important districts in Caracas; was Governor of the state of Nueva Esparta (1997); and was a presidential candidate in Venezuela's election in 1998.

her family and to society. Most of them claimed to have achieved the necessary balance to discharge their public responsibilities. A few, however, regarded their families and personal lives as very much affected, finding no payoff whatsoever from their position. They believed that their male counterparts did not face the same amount of pressure or the same level of demands. In their view, no matter how much public responsibility a woman may have, the daily care of the family still falls primarily on her, with little chance of sharing it more widely.

7. The fight against corruption undertaken by a good number of the countries in the region is a positive development for the increased participation of women in government. With very few exceptions, the perception among the public is that women are more responsible, harder workers, and are more honest than their male counterparts. In addition, since women find it very difficult to operate in a world laden with influence-peddling and backroom deals, the fight against corruption is creating a more comfortable environment for them to participate. As a result, having more women in cabinet positions and entering politics could be an important corruption-reducing factor.

IV. PARTICIPATION AND POWER: A DISSOCIATED PROCESS

In general, the presence of more women in ministerial positions has not, until now, translated into more power or more development. This outcome cannot occur unless other changes in the political and administrative structures take place in the different nation-states. More formality must be brought into the decision-making process because the usual informality in the handling of political affairs and public administration in some countries prevents women from performing their best work.⁷⁶

The female ministers interviewed were ambivalent in this respect. On one hand, many of them thought that they had not faced any hindrance in the discharge of their duties. On the other hand, however, most women stated that they had been excluded when discussing management styles at the highest levels of government or had to undertake important negotiations with their colleagues to get their programs or budgets approved.⁷⁷

The foregoing leads to the conclusion that, despite a strong increase in their numbers, female ministers have not been able to cause important changes in public policy because, in general, they have not been included in the inner circles of decision-making that surround the president of the republic. This is especially true of countries with a strong presidency, such as those in Latin America, where the decision-making process is rather “in-

76. LAS MUJERES LATINOAMERICANAS EN LA ALTA GESTIÓN PÚBLICA, *supra* note 10.

77. *Id.*

formalized" (sic).⁷⁸ Official decision-making institutions later validate these informal decisions, at times creating the impression that important decisions are made by *those who can, not by those who should*.⁷⁹ If a female minister opposes the decision or defends her prerogatives in the matter, she is usually replaced.⁸⁰

Some women stated that their participation in decision-making is not real. One of them said, "We have moved into managerial positions, but the decisions do not come through us."⁸¹ Another woman indicated that the lack of internal cohesion among women in positions of responsibility has limited their ability to wield power.⁸² She singled out the lack of concerted action among parliamentarian women in her country in matters other than gender.⁸³

A major concern felt by female ministers during their tenure has been the limitation of not having enough power or the necessary tools to achieve a transformation of the development model towards policies aimed at fostering the common good. Their inability to add women's issues to the development agenda also concerned many women. In other words, they lacked actual power to pursue state policies that would go beyond the administration's official policy.

In most of the countries of this region, women identified the absence of a long view of sustainable development, the predominance of short-term policies, and the lack of formal structural reforms as factors that kept them from achieving their goals.⁸⁴ They acknowledged the lack of individual power to influence changes in the development model as the single most important factor.⁸⁵ A critical mass of women, united in one vision of democratic governability, can make a difference.

Women discussed various approaches to a development model that would reduce poverty and strengthen democratic governability at the meeting of female ministers in September of 2003, and at a gathering of women leaders organized by the IDB in 2000.⁸⁶

The women at the conference brought forth many challenges, including the challenges to achieve equitable growth and to arrive at an inclusionary development model.⁸⁷ One female minister⁸⁸ mentioned that women in

78. *Id.*

79. *Id.*

80. *Id.*

81. *Id.*

82. LAS MUJERES LATINOAMERICANAS EN LA ALTA GESTIÓN PÚBLICA, *supra* note 10.

83. *Id.*

84. *Id.*

85. *Id.*

86. Inter-American Development Bank, *Informe Final y Discusiones en las Mesas de Trabajo de la Reunión de Ministras Latinoamericanas, Celebrada en Septiembre del 2003* [Meeting of Latin American Women Ministers: Final Report and Workshop Discussions], IDB (2003).

87. *Id.* at § 6.1.

88. Nina Pacari (Ecuador).

cabinet positions and in politics should foster *change through continuity* to strengthen positive policies while avoiding the usual policies of permanent improvisation brought about by the constant replacement of ministers in our countries with the resulting waste of time and resources.⁸⁹ Other female leaders suggested focusing on a global view of development that would define the kind of society we want, bringing together the concepts of democracy and development once again and, at the same time, reinforcing the Latin American people's faith in democracy as a better way of life.⁹⁰

Several of the women in attendance agreed that women in positions of power can make their greatest contribution by facilitating dialogue and forging agreements because a fundamental tool of democracy is concerted action.⁹¹ Some of them pointed to the fact that women do this all the time in their personal lives, negotiating agreements within the family, school, community and society at large.⁹²

V. FAIRNESS AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNABILITY⁹³

Democratic governability and equitable growth are the goals for this millennium. The objective is to create a society that has the capacity to face challenges and generate solutions based on a strong social consensus for the benefit of the greatest number of people. The question we should ask ourselves is whether it is possible to arrive at a strong social consensus when one-half of the population holds less than one-fourth of the important positions in which consensus-based solutions ought to be formulated and proposed.

It is impossible to develop public policy or obtain a consensus without the active and genuine participation of women. Their vision—their perception and points of view—must be part of the solution, which cannot happen if women do not participate or wield real power to foster real changes. We are not talking about replacing the male view with that of the female, rather the need to integrate male and female points of view, to consider and value them within a strategy for pursuing the common good.

At the Latin American ministers meeting organized by the IDB, it was pointed out that what prevents women from participating in the formulation

89. Author's observations from the *Meeting of Latin American Women Ministers: Final Report and Workshop Discussions*, *supra* note 86, at §14.1.

90. *Id.*

91. *See id.*

92. *Id.*

93. There is disagreement on the exact meaning of the terms *governability* and *governance*. In general, *governability* refers to the relationship between the demands of the society and the ability of the political structures to respond to those demands; whereas *governance* implies a form of government with its particular characteristics, usually regarded as a condition for *governability*. Some authors see both terms as referring to the State's ability to govern. Without *governability*, the State cannot have a stable and well structured government, which is necessary to properly address the demands of the citizenry.

and implementation of public policy is not discrimination but inequity.⁹⁴ It is not enough that a token woman should be appointed occasionally to some government post, especially one with a social portfolio, simply because people believe women are more patient and have a better understanding of problems or are more generous. Rather, they make up one-half of humanity and they have much to offer when it comes to finding solutions, not only to advance an agenda on women's issues, but also and especially to promote an agenda for the entire society.

There can be no equitable solution without inclusion, and there is no democratic governability or economic development without fairness. It should not be forgotten that governability is an eminently political concept based on the ability to have an achievable and shared vision for the nation and the necessary tools to translate the citizens' aspirations into government action. This concept can be expressed only through truthful and realistic political campaigns; through the appointment of government officials dedicated to fulfilling campaign promises; and transparency in government that would justify the trust of the electorate, as expressed through the ballot box. Along with transparency, it is necessary to have mechanisms in place for the society to assess and control government action.

The search for democratic governability ought to be innovative and respectful of differences, both internal and external. It cannot be achieved through isolated projects. It requires an integrative vision developed through the political process with full participation of all sectors of civil society, a vision in which the contribution of women is fundamental.

Democracy in Latin America is being questioned for a number of reasons. People perceive that it has achieved very little in comparison to the aspirations of the citizens and that corruption is rampant, which undermines confidence in the institutions and in politicians. They also sense a lack of fairness in the justice system and increased poverty and unequal distribution of income. We ask if increased participation of women in decision-making positions can undo some of these perceptions, strengthen integrative policies for the common good, and contribute to a better society. We hope it will be possible.

The impressions of the female ministers regarding their tenure in office lead to the thought that in general, the women believe they have performed an important task, but without a lasting impact on the quality of development. Consequently, one cannot conclude that having more women in government or in politics will guarantee better policies. Nevertheless, their presence assures more equitable policies and the possibility of a more integrative vision for the society: a vision of a more inclusive process of

94. Author's observations from the *Meeting of Latin American Women Ministers: Final Report and Workshop Discussions*, *supra* note 86, at §14.2.

development that also takes into account ethnic and cultural perspectives in all areas of policy making.

The world is becoming accustomed to seeing women in decision-making positions, and most people have a positive view of their contributions. It is difficult, however, to assess the extent to which their contribution is generating change, based on either the form or the content of the leadership they exercise. In addition, it remains difficult to determine whether the presence of women in decision-making positions contributes to improving the situation and the status of women in society at large because only a small number of women have occupied these positions thus far, making them too few in number to form a critical mass with the ability to have an impact.

Leaving aside the above observations, their limited contributions may be explained by the fact that a significant number of the women elevated to ministerial positions do not come from political circles but from civil society or from the bureaucracy, leaving them isolated within government teams.⁹⁵ Although many view this situation as problematic, it has the potential to create an opportunity for women to forge alliances with other women from different political persuasions as they develop long-term policies.

The great contribution of women to the design and development of public policy has barely started, and a broad array of issues must be resolved before their contributions can be effective. Some of these issues pertain to women alone, while others involve the structural foundation of the society and global politics of development and the common good. A number of issues merit further study:

1. How can we cut across the issue of gender so that it will be taken into account in every public policy, thus reducing the “invisibility” of women and enabling the implementation of focused policies and programs?
2. How can we find formulas to build and strengthen contacts among women in high public office so they can share their experiences and political knowledge?
3. What mechanisms of affirmative action could complement the legal framework to create incentives for the active participation of women in every field?
4. How can we sustain and increase professional training opportunities for women at every level in order to provide them with the tools for participation and for their own improvement and that of their families?
5. As newcomers to the world of politics, women can play a prominent role in the promotion of ethics in politics, fostering the necessary changes to improve governability and make politics a more decent pursuit. To do so, they need resources. The challenge con-

95. See IPU, *supra* note 52.

sequently, is to find financial backing to support the participation of women in national and regional elections that does not require them to assume obligations that may limit or influence their activities once in office.

6. What cultural or institutional changes must take place so that having more women in higher public office will result in more power to affect public policy? How can strategic alliances between men and women be developed to create spaces of participation, and how can they be formed among women in positions of power?
7. The process of inclusion is accelerating in terms of numbers of women in politics; however, how can the same increase be achieved in qualitative terms as well?

These reflections do not fully account for all of the factors that must be considered as part of the strategy for fairness and advancement toward a positive contribution of women to economic development. Both our experience and the study of the dynamics of the process are new, and there are many variables in terms of culture, ethnic background, economic and social status. Ultimately, the goal is to change the patterns of power, fostering a better social balance in the process. It is therefore necessary to continue to delve deeply into the matter to gain a better understanding not only of the role of women, as was the focus of this study, but to evaluate their male counterparts as well. It is important to understand and to share the experiences of those women who have participated at the highest levels of decision-making so that we will be able to answer some of the questions and reflections raised here.

VI. CONCLUSION

There has been considerable progress in Latin American countries in the participation of women in economic and social affairs. This progress has been especially important in the participation of women in decision-making, particularly in ministerial positions. There have been more than four-hundred female ministers since 1944—an exponential increase since the first was appointed. At the beginning of 2008, there were 86 female ministers in office, 23% representing Latin American countries.

Not only has there been a quantitative increase in the number of women at the ministerial level, but there has also been an important qualitative change towards difficult and complex areas regarding economics, finance, defense, and foreign affairs. Women are now increasingly visible as they endeavor to reach the highest political offices in their countries.

To explore the factors that supported the acceleration of this process and its importance for the development in Latin American countries and to identify potential support for this process, the author of this article has con-

ducted different methods of research throughout the years by consulting with an important number of ministers in twelve countries.

Several factors have contributed to the increase of women's participation in decision-making. Although each country has its own set of factors, it is possible to make the following generalizations regarding the cause of this increase: a stronger democratic process which has increased training and professionalization, wider political participation, increased social conscience regarding the role of women and their contributions—not only to the family but to society—a legal national framework that is favorable to the participation of women and international pressure, especially through the United Nations, to promote equitable treatment and decrease gender discrimination.

At present, having more women in ministerial positions has not resulted in more power or more development. This outcome will not occur unless other changes in the political and administrative structures take place in the different nation-states. More formality must be brought into the decision-making process because the usual informality in the handling of political affairs and public administration prevents women from performing their best work.

A common concern for female ministers has been their lack of power and the necessary tools to achieve a transformation of the development model, as well as their inability to add women's issues to the agenda. In most of the region's countries, several factors, including the absence of long-term sustainable policies and the predominance of short-term policies, along with the absence of formal structural reforms, have prevented women from achieving their goals.

Democratic governability and equitable growth are the goals for this millennium. The objective is to create a society that has the capacity to face challenges and generate solutions based on a strong social consensus for the benefit of the greatest numbers. It is not possible to develop public policies or consensus without the active and genuine participation of women because their vision, their perception, and their points of view must be part of the solution; this is impossible if they do not have a seat at the political table or wield real power to foster actual changes. No equitable solution can result without inclusion, and democratic governability and economic development depend on fairness. Democratic governability ought to be innovative and respectful of differences.

VII. CALL TO ACTION

The contribution of women into the design and development of public policy has barely begun, and issues still exist that must be resolved before their contributions can be effective. Some of these issues pertain to women alone, while others involve the structural foundation of the society, global

politics of development, and the common good. The following issues merit further study:

1. How to reduce the “invisibility” of women and enabling the implementation of focused policies and programs
2. How to find formulas to build and strengthen contacts among women in high public office, so they can share their experiences and political knowledge
3. What mechanisms of affirmative action could complement the legal framework to create incentives for the active participation of women in every field?
4. How to sustain and increase professional training opportunities for women at every level
5. How to acquire financial backing to support the participation of women in national and regional elections without their having to assume obligations that may limit or influence their activities once in office
6. What cultural or institutional changes must take place so that having more women in higher public office will result in more power to positively affect public policy?
7. How to create spaces of participation in all areas

These reflections are not a full account of the factors that must be considered as part of the strategy for fairness and advancement toward a positive contribution of women to economic development. Ultimately, the goal is to change the patterns of power, fostering a better social balance in the process. Consequently, it is necessary to continue evaluating these matters further to gain a better understanding not only of the role of women, as was the focus of this study, but to assess their male counterparts as well.