

The gender Implications of trade liberalization: the case of South America

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Abstract

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

This paper reviews major trends in trade liberalization in South America and the empirical literature on the gendered impacts of that liberalization. Empirical studies on gender impacts of trade liberalization in South American countries can be divided roughly in four groups. The first group comprises studies focused on the size and characteristics of female employment generated by non traditional agro-export industries. The second group of studies is concentrated on the impacts of trade liberalization on female participation in urban labour markets. The third group concerns studies on the informal urban sector.

Another important field of research address the impact of the liberal agenda on female smallholder or peasant production, a phenomenon associated with an increase in the share of female-headed rural households.

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

ABBREVIATIONS

CAN	Andean Community (Spanish acronym)
CEPAL	United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC known by its Spanish acronym)
FTAA	Free Trade Area of the Americas
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
ILO	International Labour Organization
Mercosur	Common Southern Market
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Area (Agreement)
SELA	Latin American Economic System (Sistema Económico Latinoamericano)
WTO	World Trade Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

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

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

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

There are already excellent surveys of the empirical literature on trade and gender, with a few of them covering also Latin America. A group of hypotheses can be summarized: 1. Women prevail in labour intensive exporting industries that tend to provide precarious jobs with little or no social benefits (feminization of jobs). In this case, their welfare is directly affected by eventual job loss due to lack of competitiveness of local exporting enterprises or by reallocation of activities by large multinational enterprises searching for cheaper labour elsewhere. 2. Women prevail in subsistence and family farm production which can be import competing. In this case, their welfare is affected by cheaper imports of agricultural products (that may be subsidised in the country of origin). 3. Technological intensification of productive systems tends to reduce the presence of women in the job market (de-feminization of jobs). 4. The nature of women's integration into labour markets

brought about by trade liberalization and trade expansion can potentially challenge intra-family relations. There is impressionistic evidence that in some cases finding employment in the exporting industry improved women's bargaining power in the household.

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

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

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

South America is a heterogeneous set of economies at various levels of economic and institutional development. The majority of these economies have not succeeded in diversifying their productive structure towards internationally competitive manufacturing industries. They remained commodity exporters subject to the vagaries of international commodity prices. While all commodity exporters are affected by this structural external vulnerability, there are great differences between the implications of agricultural and mineral industries for the development process, particularly in terms

of generating backward and forward linkages with the rest of the economy, and in providing decent jobs. Historically, mineral production and exports tend to create enclaves with little spill-over to other sectors of the economy unless there is a deliberate effort from the state to promote linkages.

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

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

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

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

Two major hypotheses that were generated by the literature on trade and gender in manufacturing exports are also valid for high-value agricultural exports. The first concerns the nature of female jobs generated by the expansion of exports known as the "feminisation of exporting jobs" due to the working conditions of export-processing operations. The basic hypothesis is that labour-intensive exporting industries demand "feminine" skills that include obedience, manual dexterity, patience,

acceptance of hierarchy, and lack of labour militancy. Women are sought because they are likely to accept working conditions unacceptable to men (lack of job security and work-related benefits). The second-related hypothesis refers to the “glass ceiling” represented by the consequences of technological upgrading of exporting operations on female manufacturing jobs. Women are hired for unskilled “feminine” jobs (sewing in textile operations, for instance) and they are replaced by men when technological upgrading is introduced. Both hypotheses are validated in the cases of South American high-value agricultural exports with the caveat of insufficient data for rigorous conclusions.

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

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

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1. Introduction

There is a broad agreement in the economic literature that trade liberalization has costs and benefits albeit the predominant view is that the long-run benefits largely exceed short-term costs. For many years the debate on the costs of opening domestic markets to import competition was focused on the consequences for the export diversification of developing countries. Without market protection, it was believed that countries endowed with abundant natural resources and unskilled labour, as it is the case of South American economies, were condemned to be specialized in products intensive in natural resource and unskilled labour.¹ It was only in the last two decades, that distributive questions have moved first from inter-country to within country allocation of the gains from trade; and, secondly, from macro to micro research connecting trade policy and trade expansion to social and gender inequality. This is to say, with questions linking “macroeconomic policy instruments to the microeconomic level consequences of their deployment” (Kanbur 2009, p. xi). The quest for efficiency of resource allocation rather than equity still rules most of mainstream trade models.

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

Trade is the most visible channel for the integration of national economies to world markets. Past episodes of financial crisis as well as the current economic crisis have shown however, that the effects of capital market integration can be much more harmful to local economies and to people than integration through trade flows.² Trade and trade liberalization are different in nature although

¹ Starting in the late 1940s, the debate on the distributive aspects of trade benefits was concentrated on the unequal pattern of distribution among developed and developing countries (see Bielchowsky 1998).

² A recent paper by Christiansen, Schindler and Tressel (2009) found no systematic positive correlation between capital account liberalization and economic growth.

trade liberalization is often used as a catchphrase to designate a growth strategy led by exports whose compositions is determined by market forces.

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

Trade and trade policy affect men and women in their conditions as workers, producers, and consumers, and affect women in particular, because of their role as care providers within households and communities. Trade expansion and trade policy affect men and women differently because gender relations impinge on individual access of men and women to productive resources and to trade benefits. It should not be forgotten, however, that within gender groups inequalities can be even greater than between groups. In other words, within male and female groups, access to economic opportunities and assets is a critical function of factors such as social class, race, ethnicity, and rural-urban characteristics that are at the origin of individual resource endowments.³

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

2. Conceptual and Methodological Questions

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

³ At least It is an empirical fact that poor women work more hours than richer women (World Bank 2001).

and unskilled labour (as well as other factors of production) indirectly through price effects in good markets. Higher prices for exporting goods as compared to import-competing products should lead entrepreneurs to expand production and increase employment in these industries

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

Short-term models of foreign trade are empirically more relevant since they assume that some factors of production are specific to individual industries accepting that their migration to other industries requires time: this is true for workers, machinery, and land use. Firms will require a period of time to adapt products and processes to the new price conditions. Intuitively, factors specific to exporting industries in expansion will share in the gains of trade; while factors specific to industries in decline will suffer (Krugman and Obstfeld, 2004).⁴ Therefore the trade theory incorporates negative distributional results from trade liberalization, albeit during a transitional period.⁵ In real life however, the mismatch between qualifications in the supply side and the demand for labour can become permanent. . Other assumptions are also required on labour skills and production technology for a net creation of employment to materialize. In the short-run, unskilled labour that is abundant in developing countries may be incompatible to the technology of production required by international competition, an empirical fact that is at odds with the theory of international trade. Jobs can be destroyed at higher rate than jobs are created. If there is a mismatch between domestic unskilled human resources and exporting industries' demands for skilled labour a large part of the labour supply may become redundant and the optimistic expectations of mainstream economists will not be fulfilled.

Some skills of workers may be rendered redundant also for reasons not taken into account by the theory. For instance, let us take two industries, apparel and steel. The former employs intensively women, and the latter employs predominantly men. Let us imagine that clothing is the import-competing industry and the steel industry would be the export expanding industry. In the short-run, after domestic markets are opened to import competition, the apparel industry will contract increasing female unemployment. The steel industry will expand but since it is a capital-intensive industry jobs will not be generated at the same rate that the industry expands. Even in the long run,

⁴ Another critical assumption in trade models is that there is perfect competition in both goods and factors markets with no power relationships or strategic actions. In addition, the political economy implicit in trade models includes the presence of a benevolent and neutral State, and total passivity on the part of economic agents. In real life, economic agents are not homogenous, and the literature of collective action shows how some agents are able to evaluate the costs and benefits of trade policies, to define their preferences in the face of such policies, to overcome problems facing collective action, and to seek the means to influence policy formulators (see Adserà and Boix, 2003).

⁵ The historical paper by Paul Samuelson (1939) provided theoretical legitimacy to the formulation of compensatory policies aiming at balancing gains and losses between capital and labour after trade liberalization.

unemployed women in clothing will not acquire the skills to be hired by the steel industry because social norms preclude women from being employed there. Discriminatory social norms are not taken into consideration by the trade literature.

It is in their multidimensional roles as workers or entrepreneurs, consumers, and care providers that the majority of women suffer the impact of macroeconomic policies, particularly of trade policy, sometimes with conflicting results.⁶ Cheaper consumer (or industrial) goods may benefit women as consumers (or as producers), but they may lose their jobs if the enterprise they work for becomes less competitive than its foreign competitors. Jobs lost at enterprises that cannot face up to the new foreign competition may be compensated by jobs created in competitive exporting enterprises.

Studies on the impacts of trade on gender equity started earlier. The first studies on trade and gender were concerned with the gender impacts of trade and the internationalization of production rather than the effects of trade policy. Researchers were attracted by the consequences on gender relations from the recruitment of a vast number of women in Asian countries by export manufacturing enterprises, mostly in textile and apparel industries, but also in electronic products (Elson and Pearson 1989). The contradictory implications from the employment of unskilled female labour by “late industrialization” on patriarchal relations and gender equity opened a fertile area of research that brought together different segments of economic studies, such as trade, labour and household economics, and forced economists to deal with complex macro-micro relations (Elson and Pearson eds. 1989).⁷

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

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

⁶ Trade policy also has a fiscal dimension that may affect the family unit and women through its impact on social spending and may result in an increase (or decrease) of unpaid activities by women.

⁷ Conceptual and methodological difficulties kept gender-specific aspects of trade liberalization away from mainstream economics. Only recently there have been efforts to employ standard economic analysis on such questions (Bussolo and De Hoyos eds. 2009).

electronic products).⁸ As it will be discussed below, South American exporting industries are not intensive employers of women, although women have also been intensively employed in the non-traditional agricultural exports of countries such as Chile, Ecuador, and Colombia.

There are already excellent surveys of the empirical literature on trade and gender, with a few of them covering also Latin America (see Thorin 2001 and 2003).⁹ A group of hypotheses can be summarized: 1. Women prevail in labour intensive exporting industries that tend to provide precarious jobs with little or no social benefits (feminization of jobs). In this case, their welfare is directly affected by eventual job loss due to lack of competitiveness of local exporting enterprises or by reallocation of activities by large multinational enterprises searching for cheaper labour elsewhere. 2. Women prevail in subsistence and family farm production which can be import competing. In this case, their welfare is affected by cheaper imports of agricultural products (that may be subsidised in the country of origin).¹⁰ 3. Technological intensification of productive systems tends to reduce the presence of women in the job market (de-feminization of jobs). 4. The nature of women's integration into labour markets brought about by trade liberalization and trade expansion can potentially challenge intra-family relations. There is impressionistic evidence that in some cases finding employment in the exporting industry improved women's bargaining power in the household. It should not be forgotten, however, that the integration of local economies into world markets brings more insecurity to job markets.¹¹

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

⁸ See Ventura-Dias (2003) for a discussion of the implications for the trade theory of the new international organization of production.

⁹ See for instance, Fontana 2009; Fontana, Joeques and Masikas 1998; Çagatay 2005; Grown, Elson and Cagatay 2000; Tran-Nguyen and Zampetti (eds.) 2004; Tran-Nguyen 2004; Ventura-Dias 2005.

¹⁰ The NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) brought to Mexico subsidised agricultural imports from the United States that negatively affected Mexican domestic farms.

¹¹ Two recent documents jointly produced by the ILO and the WTO recognised that current conditions of international trade, with the fragmentation of production and the intra-industrial specialization of tasks (activities), imparts to enterprises greater power of arbitrage over prices, weakens the bargaining position of workers, and leads to job insecurity (ILO-WTO, 2007; ILO-WTO 2009).

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

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

A consensus emerged from recent economic research that trade and gender as much as trade and poverty are multidimensional and complex topics. To assess gender equity effects from trade liberalization requires a better understanding of the nature, pace and scale of changes launched by trade liberalization. Macro and micro issues must be related, and the mediation between them, through markets, policies and institutions have to be elucidated (Bussolo and De Hoyos 2009; Fontana 2009; Giordano 2008). Labour market institutions, property rights institutions, markets and other institutions mediate the relations between trade and the final outcomes at the household level (Bardhan, 2005; Jansen and Nordås 2004). In this sense, the important role of domestic policies to alleviate the adjustment costs that result from trade liberalization and to increase its benefits cannot be overlooked. Relevant institutions and public policies can be effective in reducing adjustment costs either by compensating the negatively affected industries, by facilitating the training of displaced workers, or by enhancing the operation of particular markets. There has not been much research on institutions and public policies that have a bearing on attenuating (or enhancing) the negative impacts of trade liberalization on gender inequalities in access to resources and opportunities.

Although within the space of this short essay it is not possible to provide a full picture of changes promoted by trade liberalization in nine heterogeneous South American countries, the following section describes the general features of the process in broad strokes.

3. Trade liberalization in South America: the role of regional integration schemes.

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

Trade liberalization comprises the reduction of tariff and non-tariff barriers, which can be accomplished through unilateral domestic policy and legislation and/ or through international agreements negotiated at the bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral levels. Economists believe that trade liberalization should be a unilateral decision by governments. Historically however, opening trade to domestic competition was the outcome of reciprocal agreements negotiated between trading partners.¹² The "unilateral" trade liberalization that was carried out in Latin America as part of structural adjustment programmes is explained by the context of reduced bargaining power of Latin American governments derived from the debt crisis of the 1980s.¹³ Lowering or increasing tariffs directly influence the relative prices of domestic and imported goods thereby affecting the composition of exports and imports.¹⁴ Other instruments such as subsidies or administrative actions that imply quantitative measures (quotas) also affect the relative prices of domestic and foreign goods.¹⁵

It was not just a coincidence that the process of unilateral trade liberalization in the region together with the deepening of multilateral trading rules took place along with a new wave of regionalism. The new regionalism, epitomized by the legal framework of the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement)¹⁶, challenged traditional views of regional integration on two basic grounds. First, NAFTA extended the same obligations to governments irrespective of their level of economic and social development.¹⁷ NAFTA included two industrialized countries (the United States and Canada) and one developing country, Mexico that abdicated the right to a differentiated and preferential

¹² As Krugman (1997) ironically phrased, governments seem to be willing to do themselves a good only if other governments also do the same.

¹³ Nonetheless, empirical studies showed that greater pragmatism prevailed in the way trade liberalization was carried out than implied by trade reform literature. See the studies in Lengyel and Ventura-Dias (2004) that showed evidence on that assertion.

¹⁴ The discussion on trade and gender in this paper refers only to merchandise trade. In general, the trade in services is affected by different trade policy instruments, as it will be mentioned in section 4.

¹⁵ Trade policy includes trade liberalization objectives, but it also can be formulated to promote and diversify domestic exports.

¹⁶ NAFTA was negotiated in the early 1990s and entered into force in January 1st 1994.

¹⁷ Until the creation of NAFTA, there were only two types of regional schemes: the European model among countries of similar level of development, and regional arrangements among developing countries.

treatment.¹⁸ Second, NAFTA includes the liberalization of trade in goods and services (except the movement of persons), rules on investment and on intellectual property rights, but it does not intend to be more than a free trade area.¹⁹ During the Clinton Administration, the extension of NAFTA-like rules to the whole Western Hemisphere was envisaged through the creation of a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).²⁰ Later, NAFTA-plus trade agreements were promoted by the Bush Administration at the bilateral level as a means to press for rapid results at the FTAA negotiations.

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

From a Latin American perspective, the new wave of regionalism also signalled the intention by governments to retain control over the pace and the extension of trade liberalization. In South America, the Mercosur (Common Southern Market) was formally created through the Asuncion Treaty signed in March 1991 by the Presidents of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. Later, Chile and Bolivia became associate members.²¹ The Andean Community is much older. The integration scheme started in 1969 as the Andean Pact or the Andean Group, when five Andean countries: Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru signed the Cartagena Agreement. In February 1973 Venezuela decided to adhere to the Andean Group. Chile left the Andean Group in 1976. In the early 1990s, the Andean governments decided to revive the regional integration scheme and created the Andean Community (CAN).²² Disagreements about the nature of trade agreements that were negotiated by Colombia and Peru with the United States, led Venezuela to resign her CAN

¹⁸ The principle of differential and special treatment was introduced by developing countries in the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) in the early 1950s, and it remained an important negotiating principle to developing countries..

¹⁹ For many decades, Jacob Viner's terminology that distinguished between free trade areas, customs union and common market constituted the conventional wisdom in regional integration. The creation of free trade areas was the first step in regional integration, but it included basically the free movement of goods. A customs union implied the adoption of a common tariff by the countries belonging to the regional scheme, in a further step towards a common trade policy. Finally, a common market would establish the three freedoms: the free movement of goods, of services and of capital. The fourth freedom, that of the free movement of persons, as well as the complete freedom of capital would require deeper commitments leading to the creation an internal market and eventually of a political union (Viner 1950).

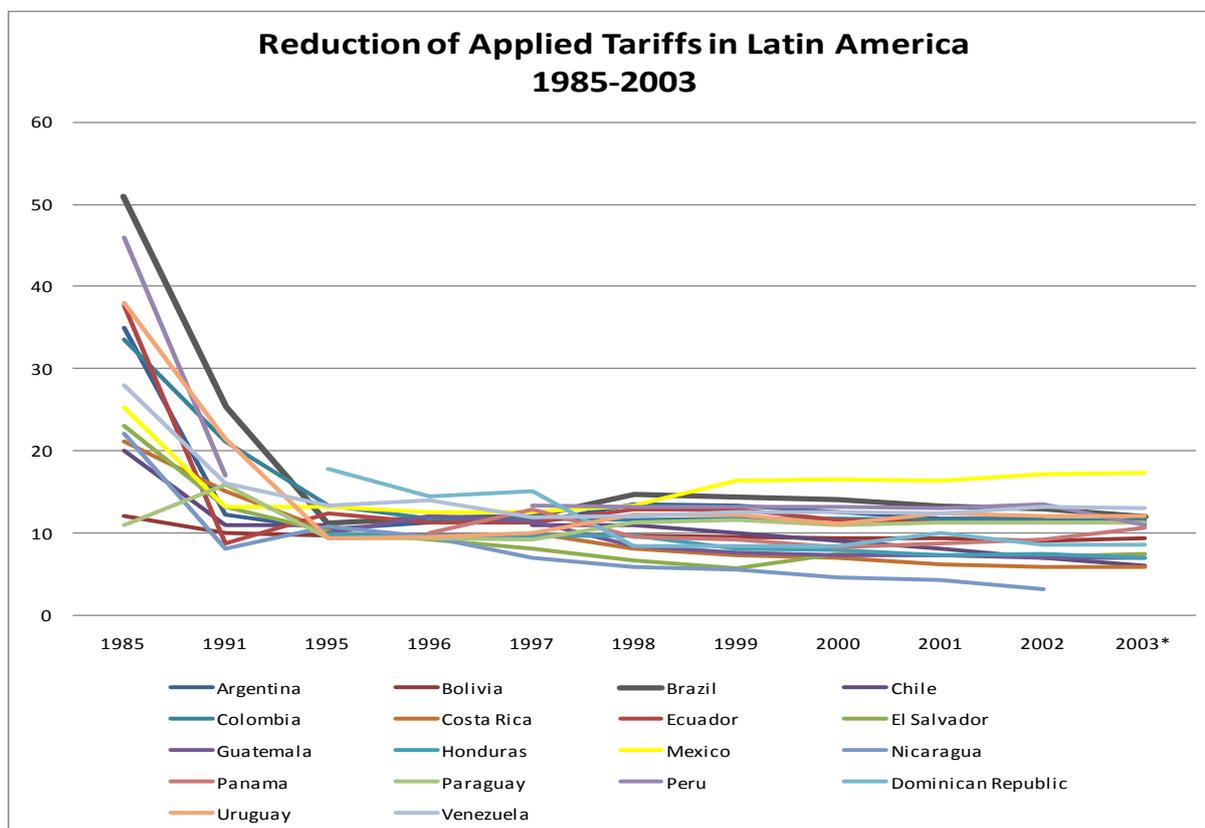
²⁰ Mercosur has negotiated as a block with third countries. Both negotiations with the United States and the European Union are stalled. The centre of the difficulties resides in agricultural liberalization that cannot be accomplished at the regional or bilateral level. The same disagreements with the same partners that have prevented the multilateral Doha round of negotiations to proceed have locked negotiations between Mercosur, European Union and the United States (see SELA 2007a). Negotiations for a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) were also blocked after ten years of intense activity at bargaining tables. For different reasons, negotiations between the Andean countries and the European Union have also reached a stand-by point.

²¹ See the official page of Mercosur for further historical and economic information (<http://www.mercosur.org.uy>).

²² See the official page of the Andean Community for further information (<http://www.comunidadandina.org>).

membership to require full membership into Mercosur.²³ In April 2006, Venezuela quitted the CAN and in September of the same year Chile was admitted as Associate Member.

Figure 1



Source: World Bank (<http://www.worldbank.org>) based on several sources (WTO, IDB, UNCTAD).

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

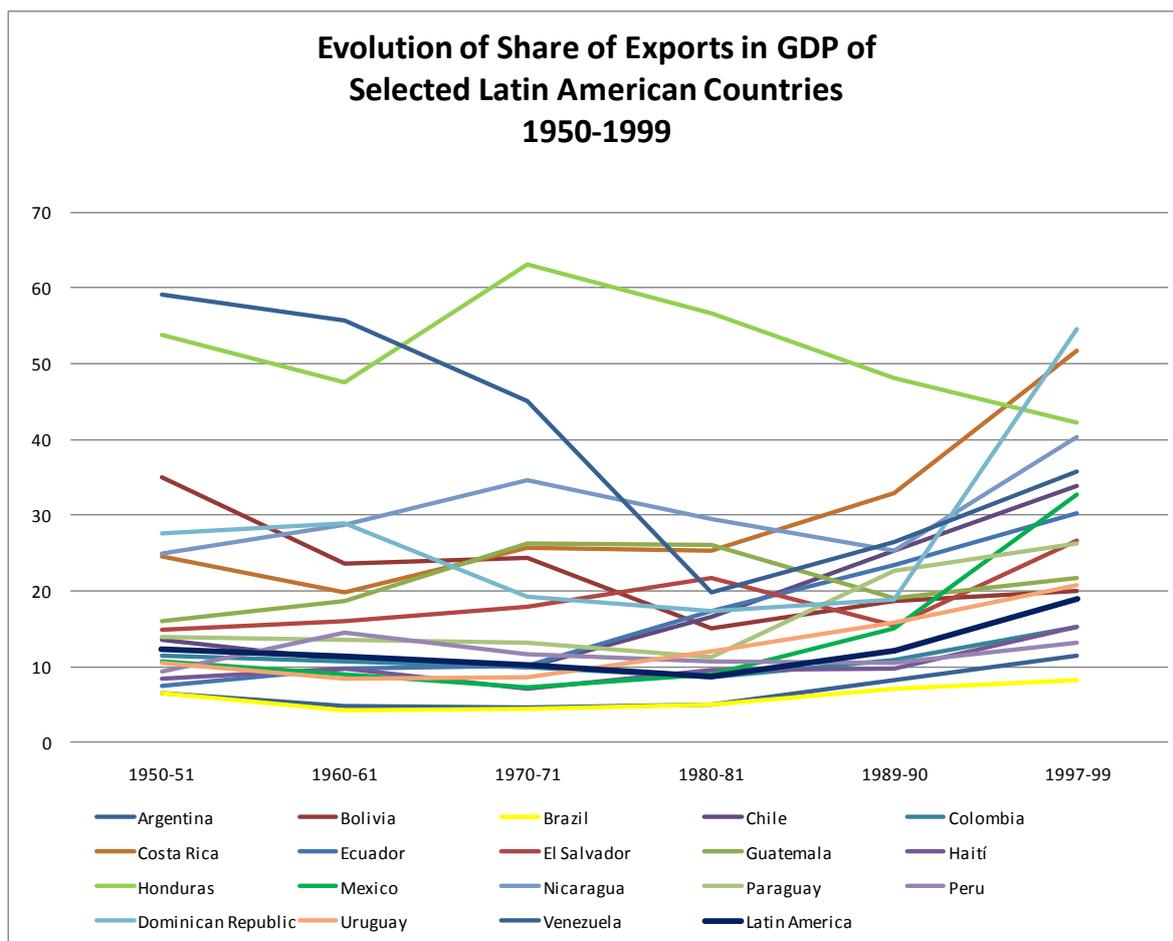
Governments of Mercosur countries, in particular Brazil, as the largest and most diversified economy, have conceived Mercosur as an inter-governmental entity with a minimum of formal institutions to carry out coordination and harmonization of common norms. On the other side, the CAN from the very beginning based its functioning on broad institutional machinery that included the Andean Court of Justice, the Andean Development Corporation, a Latin American Reserve Fund,

²³ Venezuela full membership has still to be ratified by the Paraguayan Parliament.

and the Andean Parliament. In both integration schemes there are problems into converting regional norms into domestic law and of implementing agreed communitarian decisions (SELA 2007).²⁴

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

Figure 2
Share of exports in GDP: Latin American countries



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

It is ironic that civil society has tended to be more sympathetic towards Mercosur than to WTO, while the way tariff reduction was imposed on Mercosur member countries was more devastating to the economy and employment than WTO rules. From a strict tariff reduction comparison, multilateral commitments were less stringent than regional obligations. At the WTO, negotiations made possible a great gap between the level of applied tariffs by Latin American countries (less than 11 percent) and that of bound tariffs (35 percent). In contrast, commitments that resulted from the

²⁴ See for instance the decision on double charging of tariffs between land-locked Paraguay and the other members.

Mercosur had a strict timetable for reducing more than 80 percent of internal trade to duty-free.²⁵ For instance, Brazilian domestic wheat production that was mostly produced in the South of Brazil in family-owned agricultural farms was wiped out overnight since it could not compete with low cost Argentine wheat. As mentioned above, all four countries were committed to an initial reduction of 47 percent of tariff level (Lavinias and Magina 1994). Brazilian negotiators did not bargain for a longer adjustment time to wheat producers as it was done by the Chilean government during Chile-Mercosur negotiations. Chilean negotiators protected the wheat sector for 17 years before opening up the market.

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

South America is strongly specialized in mineral and agricultural commodities, both processed and *in natura*. This trade specialization contrasts with that of Mexico and Central America, which have specialized in import-intensive exports (*maquilas*) directed to the United States. Mercosur country members (Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay) are among the most efficient world producers and exporters in grains, meat and poultry. Venezuela, Peru, Bolivia, Colombia and Ecuador that until 2006 made up the Andean Community, are endowed with abundant mineral resources, including oil, and have had difficulties in diversifying the composition of their exports.²⁶

The share of manufacturing exports in South American exports is very low. Using WTO data, in four countries manufactures account for less than 10 percent of exports: Venezuela (6 percent), Bolivia (7 percent), Ecuador (8 percent) and Chile (10 percent)²⁷. In Peru (12 percent) and Paraguay (14 percent) manufactures account for less than 15 percent). In Argentina and Uruguay, manufactures account for roughly 30 percent whereas in Colombia (39 percent) and Brazil (47 percent) the manufacturing share is more expressive, but far from Asian and industrial countries' share.²⁸ As indicated in table 1, manufactures account for averages greater than 70 percent of exports for those regions. Moreover, setting aside Brazilian aircraft exports, most of manufactured products that are exported by South American countries are natural-resource intensive albeit not necessarily labour-intensive.

Clearly, South America is a heterogeneous set of economies at various levels of economic and institutional development. The majority of these economies have not succeeded in diversifying their productive structure towards internationally competitive manufacturing industries. They remained commodity exporters subject to the vagaries of international commodity prices. While all commodity exporters are affected by this structural external vulnerability, there are great

²⁵ See Lengyel and Ventura-Dias 2004 for a set of studies on the period with a detailed bibliography.

²⁶ In 2006, Venezuela quitted the Andean Community to join the Mercosur.

²⁷ WTO classification does not include low levels of mineral processing as manufacture. Chile is a significant exporter of copper products.

²⁸ WTO country profiles (http://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/anrep_e/trade_profiles08_e.pdf).

differences between the implications of agricultural and mineral industries for the development process, particularly in terms of generating backward and forward linkages with the rest of the economy, and in providing decent jobs. Historically, mineral production and exports tend to create enclaves with little spill-over to other sectors of the economy unless there is a deliberate effort from the state to promote linkages.²⁹

Table 1
Share of manufactures in total merchandise exports and imports of different regions
2007
(percentage)

	Exports	Imports
Share in total merchandise		
World	69.8	69.8
North America	72.2	72.8
South and Central America	30.9	69.1
Europe	78.6	72.1
Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)	25.1	76.7
Africa	18.8	68.0
Middle East	21.0	75.7
Asia	81.6	63.7

Source: International Trade Statistics 2008, Geneva: World Trade Organization, table II.06 (available at <http://www.wto.org>).

Problems derived from export composition, particularly in Andean countries, preceded the adoption of the liberalization agenda. Conversely, there is no empirical evidence that trade liberalization *per se* promoted export expansion and economic growth. The honourable exception of Chile is explained by the active involvement of public policies and public institutions in export promotion and diversification (CEPAL 1990). There was a short period of high commodity prices during the years 1994 to 1997 that ended with the Asian financial crisis. It was only after 2003 with a new cycle of profitable international commodity prices that South American exports increased at rates higher than the world average (CEPAL 2008a). Sooner than expected, however, the growth cycle was aborted by the financial crisis of 2007 changed into a global recession in 2008 (SELA 2009).

During the 1990s, all Latin American economies were fully integrated to world markets, but liberalization and integration did not foster sustained economic growth. As Berry (2006) emphasised, competing studies on the growth impact of trade liberalization and integration tell different stories and “none are fully persuasive due to a wide range of methodological flaws and obstacles.” The empirical evidence showed that the rate of growth in the 1990s was low and unstable. The uncertainties surrounding a stop-and-go type of growth did not encourage entrepreneurs to invest,

²⁹ See the classical article by Baldwin (1963) on the impact of the production function of different primary products on the economic performance of exporting countries. Modern references include De Ferranti et al. 2002 and Hausman et al. 2005. In agricultural exports there is the plantations in the case of tea, coffee, bananas, that were also exporting enclaves. See Beckford 1972.

to innovate and to create jobs. Income and job instability also increased during the period (CEPAL 2004, 2008b).

Regional integration schemes have no mechanisms to counteract contracting trends in international markets and intra-regional trade in South America is characteristically pro-cyclical tending to grow when the individual economies are already growing and to contract further when the economic activity reduces. The years from 1995 to 1997 were the “golden era” for intra-regional trade. In 1997, trade within Mercosur accounted for almost 25 percent of the total trade of Mercosur countries. Thereafter the proportion of intra Mercosur trade in total Mercosur trade was reduced to less than 12 percent in 2003 to stay roughly at 14.5 percent in recent years. Similarly, because oil prices were depressed in the 1990s, in 1998 intra-regional trade accounted for almost 14 percent of total CAN exports. Thereafter, intra-CAN trade never went beyond seven percent of total CAN trade.

Both Mercosur and the Andean Community have been under considerable stress over the past decade. Colombia and Peru signed and ratified the FTA with the United States, against the critiques of the Venezuelan government and of part of the population.³⁰ After 18 years, most of trade shocks derived from Mercosur creation as a free trade area should had been absorbed by individual economies. Nevertheless, strong asymmetries in terms of industrial, institutional and entrepreneurial development have led to frictions between Brazil and Argentina, in particular, that added to others that existed between Argentina and Uruguay.³¹

Gender concerns are included and institutionalised at different levels in the Mercosur and the Andean Community (CAN) machinery. Since July 1998, Mercosur institutionalised the REM (Specialised Meeting of Women from the Spanish acronym).³² In the CAN, COMUANDE (Coordinadora de Mujeres Trabajadoras Andinas) belongs to the Consejo Consultivo Laboral Andino, which is a consulting body of the Andean Community. The purpose of these bodies is to analyse the legislation in individual country members or associates relative to the concept of equity of opportunities between men and women.

4. Trade and trade policy impacts on gender equity in South America

A rigorous assessment of trade and trade policy impacts on gender equity is hampered first, by lack of disaggregated data on male and female rural and urban activities. Second, when data is available there are no time series to allow for quantifying changes in female condition over time. Historical data is necessary to measure changes over time in the relative conditions of men and women to “seize opportunities opened up by liberalization policies and to cope with the risks and fall-outs of those same policies” (Razavi 2009: 7). In addition, it is important to keep in mind that the liberalization of domestic markets to import competition in Latin America took place along with other components of the liberalization agenda (fiscal discipline, a tight monetary policy, market

³⁰ Only the Peruvian FTA was ratified by the United States Congress while the Colombian FTA is pending a final decision by the United States.

³¹ In the wake of the recent global crisis, Argentina implemented a series of non-tariff measures aiming at protecting its enterprises and domestic employment from the competition of Brazilian products.

³² See <http://www.mercosurmujeres.org/>.

deregulation, privatization of public assets, and anti-inflationary macroeconomic policy). Because of the interactions among these policies, there are inherent problems to single out the effects on gender equity from each concrete policy as in the case of trade policy.

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

There are intrinsic data problems in quantifying changes caused by the liberalization agenda on the care sphere. Time use surveys provide information on the allocation of time by individual members of a household between different specified activities. It is a valuable source of data on who does what in caring for family members and house maintenance, in spite of all the limitations. However, there are great disparities in scope and purpose of various surveys, and most datasets do not distinguish between the leisure time of a family member and the time each family member spends on household maintenance, management, and caring for other family members (Apps 2002; Budlender 2007). Moreover, only a small group of South American countries, and only recently, included systematic data collection on time use in household surveys.³³ The literature relies on case studies that combine quantitative with qualitative methods.

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

Women have been employed massively as agricultural wage workers in the production and packing of non-traditional export crops such as fresh fruits and vegetables in Chile, and cut flowers in Colombia and Ecuador (Barrientos 1999; Deere 2009; Jaramillo and Romero 2009; Jarviz and Vera-Toscano 2004; Newman 2002). Because this employment is temporary and seasonal it is difficult to determine its size in national censuses and household surveys. Deere (2009: table 4.4) used indirect information on rural employment to derive the size of female employment in non-traditional agricultural exports. For instance, in 2002, household surveys indicated that 75 percent of rural women in Chile were employed in non-agricultural activities as compared to 58.5 percent of rural men, although non-agricultural activities is a heterogeneous set comprising also non-export-related activities (see Köbrich and Dirven 2007). Estimations for rural women employed in non-agricultural

³³ In Latin America, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico, among others, have introduced a time use module in their annual household surveys (see Aguirre 2005; Esquivel 2006).

activities vary between 60 to 80 percent female employment in cut flower production in Colombia and 50 to 60 percent in Ecuador (Dolan and Sorby 2003, table 3.3).

Export expansion through new agricultural products provided jobs for women who never had had access to monetized earnings before. Data on female rural occupation show that the majority of women in agriculture still work in farms as unpaid family workers (Ballara and Parada 2009). The literature shows that a woman's bargaining power and autonomy within the household depends on her ability to generate income and access to assets. The new source of income can enhance female bargaining power in intra-household resource distribution and disrupt patriarchal power relations. Detailed case studies, such as Newman (2002), found circumstantial empirical evidence that female employment in export activities improved gender equality. Newman(2002) documented a greater participation of men in house maintenance tasks as a positive consequence of women being employed in the cut-flower industry in Ecuador. Likewise, Madrid (2006) and Madrid and Lowell (2007) investigated the impact of the cut-flower industry on Colombian female workers. In direct interviews, Colombian female workers laid emphasis on derived benefits from formal employment such as gaining status at the household and relative economic independence. On the other hand, female workers complained of cut flower-related health hazards, of lack of autonomy at the plant and of job instability, among other things.³⁴ Nonetheless, Colombian cut-flower workers stressed that although the circumstances that had brought them to work included family crises and other difficulties, they did not have any regret for moving away from their rural past. Likewise, modern fruit export development in Chile led to increasing demand for female labour although usually only as temporary workers and often at a piece rate. There are indications that these new opportunities positively affected women and impacted the intra-household decision process (Jarvis and Vera-Toscano 2004).

Dolan and Sorby (2003) documented a high female participation in cut flowers, fresh fruit and vegetables, and to less extent in poultry.³⁵ As other researchers they also raised the question on whether lower pay and poorer working conditions are part of women's competitive strength (the "feminization" of labour conditions). The studies proposed several layers of analysis in order to understand the gender impacts of growth in those industries. First, the characteristics of the workforce should be analyzed to understand what are the factors driving the demographic profile of the industries. Second, the nature of employment generated in high-value agriculture as well as the opportunities for career mobility should be fully grasped. Finally, the social norms and intra-household issues that govern the gains women are likely to realize through labour force participation should be investigated. A sizeable body of literature shows that the skills demanded by these high-

³⁴ According to Madrid (2006: pp. 3-4) female tasks in cut flowers include "planting, disbudding the side buds of the plant, knitting to make the baskets that guide the direction that the flower plant grows, weeding, cutting the flowers, cultivation, mulching, pruning and the placing of rubber bands around the buds to keep them from opening overnight and then in the morning to remove the rubber bands, among others." Because of intensive chemical use in the industry, there have been reports of work-related health problems, including "headaches, nausea and conjunctivitis to miscarriages, congenital malformations and neurological problems."

³⁵ Most of those high-value agricultural commodities are part of global commodity chains driven by giant corporations from industrial countries.

value agricultural exporting industries are socially constructed perceptions of “feminine” skills (obedience, care, manual dexterity, diligence) deeply rooted into traditional female roles.³⁶

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

In urban labour markets, data from household surveys show that over the past two decades in all South American countries there was a general expansion in female activity rates in all groups of women separated by age, income, and years of schooling, although a high average of more than 70 per cent is reached for the cohort of young women with ages between 25 and 49 years. Likewise, there is a high correlation between rates of female labour participation and years of schooling.³⁷ Available empirical evidence shows that, after trade liberalization, labour markets were not well functioning and there was an unexpected mismatch between skills women (and men) could supply and those that the market was demanding. Consequently, unemployment hit the female working-age population harder when compared with the male population. High female unemployment rates must be added to underemployment data since quite often women find jobs in less productive sectors such as personal and domestic services. On the positive side, women have increased their stock of human capital and there has been a general reduction in the male-female wage gap, although that decline does not always correlate positively with the number of schooling years. Conversely, empirical data show that the male-female wage gap is higher in subgroups with more education (Ventura-Dias 2009).

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

There is some evidence that in the 1990s, greater integration of Latin American economies into global markets generated a labour demand bias favouring more educated workers, which tended to aggravate previous labour market segmentation (Weller 2001). The demand for skilled labour in

³⁶ See the vast bibliography on the subject of high-value agricultural exports reviewed by Dolan and Sorby (2003).

³⁷ Chile and Peru present the lowest activity rates while Uruguay presents the highest.

open economies endowed with abundant unskilled labour is a result that it is at odds with the trade theory as it was mentioned above. A large body of literature has tried to shed light on the relative roles of technology change and trade to explain the counter-intuitive results of greater demand for skilled labour in open economies with abundant unskilled labour. Although not concerned with gender dimensions, the literature should also be considered for a full understanding of the impact of trade-related variables and of technological upgrading in the creation of opportunities for unskilled female labour after trade liberalization. For instance, in the case of Brazil, empirical analysis assessed the relative impact of international trade and technological change in the nature of jobs created. Technological change could be directly responsible for the demand of skilled jobs, albeit the adoption of production technologies intensive in skilled labour was induced by greater exposition of enterprises to trade competition as the result of trade liberalisation. On the basis of the empirical evidence it was not excluded that trade liberalisation (in the circumstances in which it occurred in Brazil) had a negative impact on less qualified and less educated workers.³⁸

Using aggregated data, after analysing female employment in the four countries of Mercosur (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay,) Azar (2004) concluded that trade liberalisation did not improve the quality of female employment. She indicated that while job losses in local industries that could not compete with cheaper imports in domestic markets affected both men and women, more jobs were lost by women than by men, and women were less likely to find new employment in tradable industries than men. Similarly, a broad study that covered six Latin American countries on trade impact on gender inequalities concluded that a small proportion of women were employed in trade-related industries both in import competing and on exporting industries. Nevertheless, women accounted for more than a quarter of employment in exporting industries in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. In Chile, due to the significant size of the copper industry in which employment is predominantly male, women accounted for less than 22 percent of all employment generated by exports (Salvador 2007; Azar, Espino and Salvador 2009).³⁹

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

Much was written about the disappointing results of job creation in Latin America over the 1990s, although authors disagree on the relative role of markets and the rigidities of labour policies in explaining these results.⁴⁰ Even after the region recovered from the stagnation of the 1980s, growth rates below 3 per cent did not result in a major fall in unemployment, which remained fairly high throughout the 1990s (Berry, 2006). It is undeniable that Latin American reforms affected both men and women selling their labour services in the market, but the compiled empirical data showed that women were more affected than men both in terms of relative unemployment rates and in

³⁸ See Ventura-Dias 2007 for a review of the literature on trade impact on Brazilian job markets.

³⁹ Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Uruguay.

⁴⁰ See Weller 2001. Bourguignon (2005:13) indicated that the literature on the costs of labour-market policies is inconclusive: it is not clear that labour-market regulations reduce employment or increase unemployment.

underemployment, although with variations in individual countries. Further detailed information on the demand side of the labour market is required to examine different hypothesis on gender bias in job creation for men and women in the region.

Studies by the ILO (International Labour Organization) suggested that very few jobs were created in the formal sector after the market liberalization process took place in Latin America. Conversely, according to ILO data, in the 1990s eight out of ten new jobs in Latin America were created in the informal sector. The informal sector is defined as the sector of the economy that does not comply with labour market legislation (and other fiscal obligations) and consequently does not provide worker social benefits. The size of the informal sector is significant in the majority of Latin American countries, although under the label of informal economy there are various forms of self-employment as well as informal wage work (Razavi ed. 2009).

There is strong and robust evidence linking urban poverty with unemployment, underemployment in the informal sector, and wages below the minimum wage standard (Goldberg and Pavcnik 2004a). Goldber and Pavcnik (2004b) found no robust evidence that trade liberalization was responsible for those conditions using urban data from Colombia and Brazil. However, after a careful review of empirical studies on the impact of trade liberalization in developing countries, the same authors conceded that the evidence produced by trade economists indicated that trade liberalization could contribute to social inequality by increasing the probability of people working in the informal sector (Goldberg and Pavcnik 2007). The authors recommended a further examination of the interactions between labour market institutions, trade reform and informality. The underlying assumption is that rigidities in labour market institutions rather than trade liberalization could explain underemployment.⁴¹

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

⁴¹ Goldberg and Pavcnik (2007, pp. 29–30) also point out that the analysis of the impact of trade liberalization on transitional unemployment was hampered by conceptual and empirical factors. On the conceptual side, mainstream models of international trade assume full employment, and on the empirical side, there are no available disaggregated data.

⁴² Deere (2009) called "economic restructuring" the process of changes in Latin America agricultural production induced by the combined effect of economic crises, neoliberal policies and globalization.

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

Because women tend to be concentrated in the production of specific crops some estimation of the impact of trade shocks is possible. Parada and Morales (2005) estimated the effects of the creation of a free trade area between Ecuador and the United States on women's production based on a simple model of forecasting trade effects on selected crops predominantly produced by Ecuadorian women. In Ecuador, female agricultural producers accounted for a little over a quarter of all agricultural productive units, 63 percent of which were classified as subsistence units. The study concluded that while rural households as consumers could benefit from cheaper food products imported from the United States dramatic results could be expected in the production side. Additional policies were required to strengthen the technical capacity of female-headed agricultural units.

This brief review of the empirical literature on trade and gender in South America had the intention to offer a glimpse into a rich literature that gave greater visibility to gendered effects of macroeconomic policies.

5. Concluding remarks and areas for further studies

Trade liberalization can be seen as a process of economic transformation that starts when a nation decides to reduce the level of protection in domestic markets thereby allowing for greater autonomy of international prices in defining the trade specialization of the economy. Although trade theory perceives trade liberalization as a once-for-all event which is dated at the reduction of tariffs and elimination of non-tariff measures, in reality a more complex process of adjustment takes place overtime. In many cases, exchange rate and monetary policy can have more profound impact on domestic prices than the reduction in tariff levels. For instance, although tariffs were reduced and administrative measures were eliminated at the stroke of a pen in 1990-1991, in Brazil, the impact on relative prices of imported and domestic goods was not felt until 1994. In that year, a successful programme of price stabilization introduced a new currency (*real*) and the country adopted a pegged to dollar exchange rate policy that overvalued the local currency in dollar terms (Motta Veiga and Ventura-Dias 2004). Similarly, in more recent years, although the level of tariff protection in Brazil has been unchanged since 1995, and the country adopted a floating exchange rate, the depreciation of the dollar (United States) in real terms has reduced the international competitiveness of Brazilian exports and made artificially cheaper imported goods.

During the period of trade liberalization, markets and public policies affected gender inequalities in access to resources and opportunities although the net results are not clear. To what extent have the policies implemented during the 1980s and 1990s exacerbated or reduced gender inequality? To

give a precise and comprehensive answer to this question is nearly impossible. Moreover, liberal policies reached their zenith in the late 1990s, after a series of financial crisis rendered manifest the external vulnerability of Latin America. On the other hand, other public policies were formulated to reduce social and gender inequities. The result is that at the end of the first decade of the 21st century, Latin American women, in general, are facing better social opportunities in accessing the “constituents of development” (education, health, legal and civil rights, decent jobs and political participation) than any time before. Concrete improvements in women’s lives can be measured by reduction in fertility and in mortality rates, longer life expectancy, incentives for girls to attend primary and secondary schools, together with greater participation in political life, as well as increased political representation (CEPAL, Women and Development Unit 2007a and 2007b).

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

Although this short essay could only provide a few strokes on the empirical literature on trade and gender in South America, a preliminary conclusion is that there is still a lot to be done. There have been various econometric studies on the labour market and wage earnings, and detailed case studies covering agricultural export industries. Field studies included qualitative information on the impact of employment and income on intra-household allocation of time and power. Several dimensions of trade are still unexplored. For instance, very little work has been carried out on price effects of deeper integration into world markets on the consumption side.⁴³

There are two broad issues related to trade and trade policy that remain relatively under-researched. First, there are questions related to the impact of male and female migration on gender relations. Women have been migrating to the United States and Europe to look up for house work and children in high income families in what has been called ‘the globalization of care services’ while girls and older women back home take on their duties (Durano 2007; Herrera 2005). In Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and other South American countries, women stay behind and care for the family while male members emigrate, leading to a high proportion of female heads in peasant farms. Although some research was done on migrants’ remittances, the impact of migration on gender relations is an area that requires further research. Likewise, services are a crucial component of women’s welfare. On the one side, state-delivered and market-delivered services replace care services provided by women in the household, and on the other hand the sector is the major employer of women everywhere and in Latin America as well. The implications of international obligations derived from WTO agreement on liberalization of trade in services, particularly in

⁴³ See Bussolo and De Hoyos (eds.) (2009) for a few studies on Africa.

education and health services generated a few studies (Salvador 2003), but the field remains basically unexplored.

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