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In today's interconnected world, it is virtually impossible to discuss human development without referring at some point to women's empowerment and inclusion. Empowerment refers to increasing the social, spiritual economic or political strength of individuals and communities and, as award-winning economist Amartya Sen has argued, "nothing is more important for development today than the economic, political and social participation of women."¹ Women make up just over half of the world's population, and as such cannot be ignored, both as equal human beings as well as potential contributors to growth and expansion in all nations and societies. In this paper, we will examine the evolution of attitudes towards women as well as those categories in which progress (or lack thereof) can be used to determine overall development in a nation. We will then turn to an

¹ Coleman, Isobel. "The Payoff from Women's Rights," *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 3 (2004): 82.



overview of Latin America as a region and examine the role of women based on this criteria, before turning to a general comparison between two Latin nations on polar ends of the development scale: Brazil, which has long been heralded as the booming economy in the region and the future of Latin American influence, and Bolivia, a poor Andean nation long held to be among the poorest states in the Western Hemisphere. In this comparison we will explore the relative positions of women in these societies and draw conclusions as to where each state stands in terms of overall women's empowerment—and how much more each still must accomplish.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN: CONTEXT AND LEADING THEORIES

Historically, women have long been relegated to a secondary role in society—a helpmate to their husbands, fathers or other male relatives whose true contribution was found at home, in giving birth to and raising a family. The international community was likewise dismissive, skirting the issues, especially in traditional patriarchal societies. Beginning in the 1970s, this attitude began to drastically change. In 1974 Margaret Bruce, Deputy Director of the UN Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, stated that “there has been a gradual awakening to the fact that the conditions of women and the roles they play affect—and may even retard—economic and social progress and development” thus highlighting the fact that while measures such as literacy, nutrition and industrialization had long been considered in society as a whole, there had been very little awareness of their progress among women and what this might mean for society.²

International organizations were quick to acknowledge this shift in focus and begin coordinating studies and actions to highlight the development of women. The United Nations named 1975 International Women's Year and the decade that followed (1976-1985) as the Decade for Women, heralding the creation of the UN's gender specific arms designed to lead the way in promoting the fact that women's rights are human rights. It went on to develop four World Conferences for Women, designed as a call to action for the world to begin the fundamental social, economic and political changes necessary to bring women into the fold as equal partners to men. In more recent years, the UN included women's equality as one of eight goals enshrined in the 2000 Millennium Goals (Goal 3: the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women). However, it has much been commented in the international community that this goal is vital to achieving the remaining ones, which address the general good of society.

The World Bank and International Monetary Fund have likewise been quick to embrace (at least on a general level) the importance of gender in broader development, and acknowledge the importance of including women's education and childhood development in any development plan. In this spirit they have built lasting long-term relationships with

² Schmidt, Steffen W. “Political Participation and Development: The Role of Women in Latin America,” *Journal of International Affairs* 30, no. 2 (1976-77): 243.

local women's groups across the globe to promote their interests and ensure that they are not left behind. An example of this can be found in the trainings World Bank offers for women politicians in Morocco to help ensure their viability as candidates.³

Regionally, there has been a growth in general awareness as well. The Asian Development Bank is promoting gender sensitive reforms in Pakistan and Mohammed Yunis won his Nobel Peace Prize for developing microfinance loans targeting women-borrowers specifically the world over. This was done not only because women represent close to 70% of the world's poor (and are at a higher risk of hunger because of systematic discrimination against them in education, health care and employment), but also because experience has shown that women tend to invest more in their families than do men, thus profiting the community as a whole.⁴

This fundamental move towards women's empowerment has engendered support because of an understanding that by empowering women we improve the life of an entire society. Extreme inequality is not only viewed as unfair, it can lead to economic inefficiency and undermine societal stability. As mentioned above, women not only bare the brunt of global poverty, they also face the lowest levels of education and wage, have difficulty accessing healthcare and have not been represented fairly at the political level. Because of all of these factors, the state of women can arguably present a better indication of development on a broad scale than household income or GDP alone. From this launching point, general consensus among the development community has been that the state of women can best be measured by looking at four fundamental categories: education levels, family and health characteristics, access to the labor force and political representation.

Education and health are closely related in development, as one fundamentally influences and impacts the other. Studies have shown that where the basic education of a mother is ensured (generally primary school) the health of her family fundamentally improves. Her children are more likely to be educated themselves, and survive into adulthood as their mother is better equipped educationally to deal with health concerns.⁵

Additionally, fertility rates decrease as more educated women opt to start families later and have fewer children. As mortality rates among mothers and infants decrease due to both health and education, the quality of women's lives also increases. Educating women and girls and ensuring their health also provides higher labor productivity and labor participation, and is an important step in breaking the cycle of poverty. In recent years,

³Supra 1, Pg 80.

⁴ "Women, Poverty and Economics." UNIFEM.
http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/women_poverty_economics/ (accessed October 25, 2010).

⁵ Todaro, Michael P., Stephen C. Smith. Economic Development. 9th ed. New York: Pearson Addison-Wesley, 2006.



measurements in 66 out of 108 countries have shown that, on average, girls' primary, secondary and tertiary school enrollment rates are less than those of boys by 9%, 28% and 48% respectively and that their mean number of years in school is 15% less than that of boys. As a consequence, female literacy rate also falls below that of males by 29% and can have disastrous consequences on health as well as access to work.⁶

Fair and equal access to the labor market is also a good indicator of women's empowerment. Not only their equal statistical share in employment sectors, but the quality of their working conditions and wage rates should also be considered. However, it is important to note, here more than anywhere, that a cursory attempt to help women in the workplace may actually be harmful rather than beneficial to women. Too often, women are overworked and underpaid, and yet still have the domestic responsibilities assigned to them by culture and habit. Anthropologist Ester Boserup argued this point in 1970 through her *Female Marginalization Thesis*, which stated that, without careful oversight, industrialization could actually lead to women being forced to work unsafe and underpaid jobs, while still maintaining their traditional role in the home. She stressed that international spectators must be extremely careful not to hold women to western standards of advancement; otherwise they are prone not to note issues that may arise and in fact leave women in a worse position than when they began. Instead, women must be engaged and included in the process to best define what will serve them in terms of economic liberation and other forms of empowerment.

This leads us into the importance of observing women's representation in the political systems of their countries. Political activism not only benefits democracy by including women, but new studies have suggested that when women are in positions of power they will make different policy choices than their male counterparts, with profound implications for the local allocation of public resources and, thus, for development. Not only will female policy makers better reflect the needs of women, it is important that local women feel they have a voice in their government and thus are more likely to become active and begin the process of closing the gender gap in policy-making. Groups such as the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) have made it a priority to encourage women in this sphere, as they acknowledge that one must have "a seat at the table" to affectively create change on a large scale.

With this great variety of inequality in mind, it is important to make mention of measurements that, while not wholly endorsed, do offer some numerical measure of women's empowerment in any country. The most notable among these is the Gender-Related Development Index (GDI) and its "mother" measurement, the broader Human Development Index (HDI). The Human Development Index was first published in 1990 (and recalculated for years as far back as 1975) by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to measure life expectancy at birth, income and education attainment (including literacy rates). This was the first true effort to incorporate quality of life into development indices rather than rely solely on GDP, which by itself is not enough to

⁶ Ibin

quantify these key aspects of development.⁷ It awards a measure between 0-1 and has been used by the UN and other organizations to determine what is felt to be the “true” measure of development. GDI expands on this idea by factoring in the level of gender inequality in each of these sectors. It also produces a score between 0-1 and the greater the gender disparity, the greater the difference between a country’s HDI and GDI. For those that utilize this measurement, it is a great tool to see how much of an impact gender inequality has on overall development, and how wide the gender-gap is in any given country.

Another measure to make quick note of is the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) which takes into account the level to which women are engaged in political and economic life in their countries. This indicator tracks representation by women in national and regional political bodies, among senior officials and managers and among professional and technical workers. It also takes note of wage disparity among men and women. The difference between GEM and GDI is that GEM tracks very specific opportunities for participation and the inequalities that may exist therein.⁸

LATIN AMERICA: A REGIONAL OVERVIEW

For the purposes of this paper we now move to reflect on these trends in Latin America as a whole, and explore the general role of women in this region and the history of their development.

Historical Context

Culturally and historically, women have played a secondary role in Latin America, as in many countries around the world. The concepts of *machismo* (what it means to be a man in Latin culture) and *marianismo* (the perception of women) have long defined gender roles and continue to be the source of some strife. *Machismo* has historically been held to refer to the “man’s man” who is able to stand above other men in courage, size and strength but it goes far beyond that. To be a man also means to be able to provide for your family, in addition to demonstrating virility through large family size. The combination of these factors means that historically, Latin families have been large and the father has been the sole provider. *Marianismo*, on the other hand, defines the role of women to be “Mary-like” (in reference to the Virgin Mary) and be the quiet helpmate to her husband as well as a devoted mother. For women, this meant that there was very little life outside the home, and marriage and family were the principle goals she aspired to.

⁷ “Human Development Index.” UNDP. <http://www.compendiosustenabilidade.com.br> (accessed October 18, 2010).

⁸ “Building the Capabilities of Women.” UNDP. http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_ITA.html (accessed October 11, 2010).



In this vein, there are five defined characteristics for the role of women in patriarchal societies as defined by sociologist Lynn Iglitzin, all of which have historically held true in Latin America: 1. The sexual divisions of labor reflect the natural differences between men and women 2. Women's identities come through their relationships with men 3. Women achieve fulfillment as wives and mothers 4. Women are childlike 5. Women are apolitical.⁹

It should be noted however, that even within this definition distinctions must be made for class level. The "elite" model painted above and popular with the ruling and middle classes depicts women as unconcerned with work and survival, while in reality "peasant [rural] women worked hard and have often been the key source of family support."¹⁰ In addition, growing trends in women's empowerment have begun changing attitudes among both men and women, and more and more women, both rural and urban have begun seeking opportunities outside the home.

With this in mind, we turn now to the general state of women today in Latin America, in terms of education, health and family, access to the labor market and political representation:

Education

Although there have been great strides made by Latin American women, there is still much to be done. In general, girls account for between 45-50% of primary school enrollment rates and around 45% of secondary school rates.¹¹ 13% of women aged 15 and over were illiterate in 1998, compared to 23% in 1980, though this was more prevalent among indigenous women.¹² This is due in large part to the drastic differences that exist in terms of quality of education, not only among states, but among classes as well. Rural women in Latin America are predominantly ethnically indigenous and in many countries (especially in the Andean region) they may speak only their indigenous tongue and have very little access to formal education in Spanish. Because of this inequality among women, despite the high enrollment rates listed above, the average

Latin woman still has completed less than primary education.¹³

⁹ Supra 2, Pg 244.

¹⁰ Supra 2, Pg 247-248.

¹¹ "2007 Statistics." *Focus International: Women in Development Network*. December 2007. <http://focusintl.com/new.htm> (accessed October 18, 2010).

¹² Htun, Mala. *Women in Political Power in Latin America*. IDEA International. Sweden, 2002: Ch 1.

¹³ Winter, Carolyn. "Women's Employment and Pay in Latin America." *All Business*. December 1992. <http://www.allbusiness.com/human-resources/345940-1.html> (accessed October 18, 2010).

Education levels also have a direct correlation to women's employment in the region. Women who have completed less than primary school are 30% less likely to enter the work force than those who have completed a college education. In Venezuela, the difference is even more pronounced with a percentage increase in the probability of entering the workforce of 53% when comparing women with primary education to women with college degrees.¹⁴

Health and Family

The general health of women and their family characteristics also greatly impact the state of society as a whole. Over the past three decades, fertility rates have plummeted around Latin America from 4.1 children per woman in 1980 to about 2.6 in 1999-- this in a region long famous for large family sizes. As shown in the figures below, the decrease can be seen across country borders and over time.¹⁵ This drop can be linked to health, education, work and cultural change, as well as an increase in the use of contraceptives among women (60% of women aged 15–45 in 1998, compared to 45% in 1980)—a significant figure considering the overall prevalence of the Catholic faith in the region which prohibits the use of birth control.¹⁶ It is important to note further that a lowering in fertility rates also has a direct correlation to improved health among women, as they are less likely to die in childbirth or suffer health consequences from numerous pregnancies and births.

| Country | 1970 | 1980 | 1990 | 1995 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|
| Argentina (1) | 3.10 | 3.50 | 2.97 | 2.62 |
| Bolivia (2) | 6.54 | 5.53 | 4.89 | 4.36 |
| Brazil (3) | 5.33 | 4.09 | 2.56 | 2.46 |
| Chile (4) | 3.28 | 2.47 | 2.55 | 2.24 |
| Colombia (5) | 4.65 | 3.60 | 2.92 | 2.87 |
| Costa Rica (6) | 4.94 | 3.63 | 3.17 | 2.83 |
| D. Republic (7) | 6.67 | 5.34 | 3.84 | 3.62 |
| Ecuador (8) | 6.30 | NA | 3.76 | 3.36 |
| El Salvador (9) | 6.62 | 5.34 | 3.84 | 3.62 |
| Guatemala (10) | 6.53 | 6.04 | 5.30 | 5.12 |
| Honduras (11) | 5.98 | 6.44 | 5.28 | 4.84 |
| Mexico (12) | 6.73 | 4.57 | 3.33 | 2.95 |
| Nicaragua (13) | 7.21 | 6.14 | 5.17 | 4.15 |
| Panama (14) | 4.99 | 3.63 | 2.88 | 2.72 |
| Paraguay (15) | 5.83 | 5.06 | 4.61 | 4.37 |
| Peru (16) | NA | 4.70 | 3.76 | 3.39 |
| Uruguay (17) | 3.00 | 2.66 | 2.53 | 2.37 |
| Venezuela (18) | 5.68 | 4.13 | 3.62 | 2.94 |

Figure 1:
Total Fertility Rates in Latin America

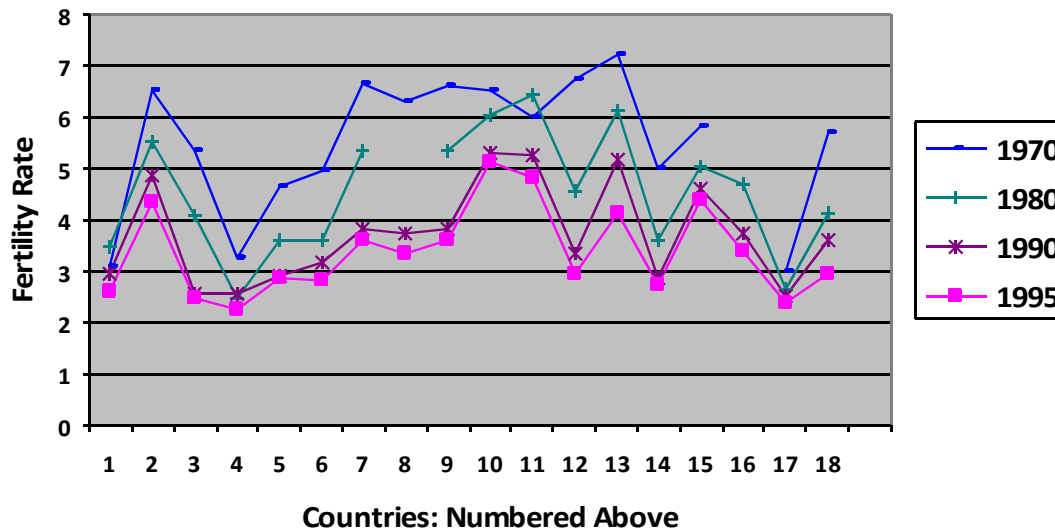
¹⁴ Ibin

¹⁵ Supra 12 (graph and data)

¹⁶ Supra 12



Figure 2: Total Fertility Rates in Latin America



Women are also choosing to marry at later ages, thus postponing beginning a family and allowing them more time to begin and establish a career. Across the region, unmarried women are still more likely than married ones to enter the workforce (50% more likely in Costa Rica). However, women with young children have a low probability of entering (or re-entering) the workforce after the births of their children (26% in Honduras).¹⁷

It must again be noted that among rural women this progress of often stifled. Rural women still lack access to quality medical care, even when their male relatives have that access. It can be difficult to quantify the effects of this lack, other than to say that women continue to be relegated to a secondary position of importance in terms of health, although this trend is continually improving as clinics are built and women continue to assert more and more of their right to access medical attention.

Labor and Economics

In addition to the points already made in reference to health and education and their impact on female employment, it is important to note the discrimination that Latin women continue to confront in the workplace. This ranges from unequal pay for equal work—men make 16% more than women for equal work in Colombia and Mexico, and up to 40% more in

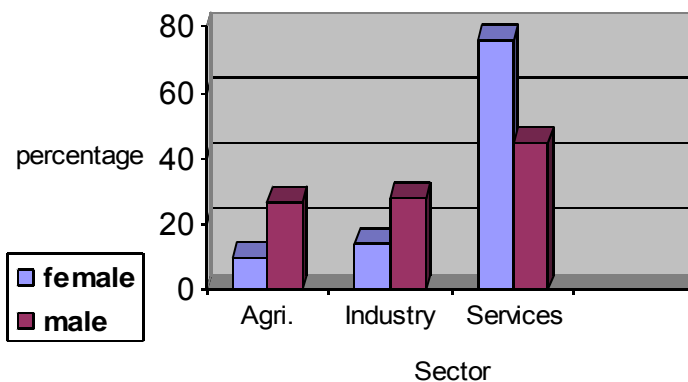
¹⁷ Adsera, Alicia and Alicia Menendez. "Fertility Changes in Latin America in the Context of Economic and Political Uncertainty." University of Chicago. 2005. <http://iussp2005.princeton.edu/download.aspx?submissionId=52343> (accessed October 18, 2010).

Argentina, Bolivia, and Ecuador—to unequal representation among the sectors of employment.¹⁸ Historically, Latin women have fallen into three general categories of employment, depending on class, regional location and level of education: Pre-industrial/Agriculture (including traditional agricultural jobs mainly held by indigenous women and rarely counted towards national statistics), Transitional/Industry (displacement of women due to agricultural advances leads to migration to the urban sectors where poor women are often exploited in low-paying and sometimes dangerous work.) and Developing/Services (better paying and sustainable positions that become available through further education and leads to smaller family size and more active women's labor force). It is interesting to note that in the 1950s and 60s the least developed countries in the region (Bolivia, for example) had some of the highest rates of female employment, due in large part to the first two categories listed.¹⁹

However, from 1970-1990 the region as a whole experienced an increase in the percentage of women's active participation in the economy as a whole from 20% to 34%. By 1994, the majority of employed women in Latin America could be found working in the service sector (76%) even surpassing the rate of men employed there. Further breakdown can be seen in the graph below (by Agriculture, Industry and Services).²⁰

In the professions women also made progress although they continued to be employed at a lower rate than men in some categories: by 1990 they made up 49% of professionals and technicians, 23% of administration and management personnel, 59% of office clerks, 47% of the sales force and 17% of manual workers.²¹

Figure 3: Female and Male Employment in Latin America 2009



Despite this progress (which while not complete is still of note), much of Latin America has not confronted existing discriminatory work policies that unfairly punish women and deny them equal pay as well as benefits during pregnancy and maternity leave, making it difficult for them to return to work after giving birth.

¹⁸ Supra 13

¹⁹ Supra 1, pg 250

²⁰ Supra 11

²¹ Ibin



Political Activism

Today more than ever before, women in Latin America are finally discovering a voice in the political system. No less than eight Latin American countries have elected female presidents (including two as female interim-presidents)—notably, before the United States has done so. However, despite the promise this represents, women in Latin America are still underrepresented on the political front.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Latin American countries began addressing the issue of under-representation of women in politics, several by implementing quotas that reserved a percentage of political seats for women, and others by providing trainings for female candidates to help make them viable in an election. These actions helped increase representation by women in the lower houses of Congress from 9% in 1990 to 15% in 2002 and from 5% to 12% in the Senates in the same time frame. Additionally, the percentage of ministerial posts held by women in the region increased from 9% in 1990 to between 13 and 25% in 2002.²²

| Country | % Ministers | % Chamber of Deputies (or equivalent) | % Senate |
|-------------|-------------|---------------------------------------|----------|
| Argentina | 8 | 31 | 36 |
| Bolivia | 0 | 12 | 4 |
| Brazil | 0 | 7 | 6 |
| Chile | 25 | 13 | 4 |
| Colombia | 19 | 13 | 10 |
| Costa Rica | 18 | 35 | |
| Cuba | 10 | 28 | |
| D. Republic | 8 | 16 | 7 |
| Ecuador | 7 | 15 | |
| El Salvador | 25 | 10 | |
| Guatemala | 8 | 9 | |
| Honduras | 26 | 9 | |
| Mexico | 16 | 16 | 16 |
| Nicaragua | 8 | 21 | |
| Panama | 25 | 10 | |
| Paraguay | 8 | 3 | 18 |
| Peru | 7 | 18 | |
| Uruguay | 0 | 12 | 10 |
| Venezuela | 21 | 10 | |

Figure 4: % Seats held by Women 2002

As a region, the percentages listed above are not far from international averages (“according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, women make up over 14% of the lower houses of congress around the world, and 14% of the senates. The averages across the 19 countries of Latin America are 15 and 12%, respectively”).²³ However, as can be seen in the graph on the previous page, which categorizes these percentages by country, there are pockets of severe lack of representation that are not accounted for in the regional statistics. This serves to remind us of the continuing inequality in Latin America and that there remains much to be achieved.

²² Supra 12

²³ Ibin

Not all states have enacted the quotas mentioned above, and there continue to be cultural and systematic obstacles to women holding too many seats of power. Although most Latin Americans profess willingness to elect qualified women to positions of power, there remain remnants of *machista* attitudes which can make it more difficult for women candidates to prove their worth. Additionally, political parties and key institutions continue to be male dominated, making it more difficult for female candidates to gain footing, regardless of qualifications and popularity. In this respect, Latin America conforms to the dominant pattern of political systems that are found around the world and which are difficult for women to gain access to.

HDI and GDI

In terms of HDI and GDI measurement, Latin America yields surprising results, begging the argument that while much has certainly been accomplished in the region, there is still much to be done.

As can be seen in the figures below (data 2010, total world ranking included), when measuring HDI on its own, Latin America holds a relatively steady middle ground,

with most nations falling within the categories of medium development (.500-.799)²⁴

However, when GDI and the Multidimensional Poverty Index (which measures inequality by poverty) are taken into account, these figures change drastically. According to the UNDP, as a whole, Latin America suffers a 24% loss in HDI ranking due to the inequalities measured by both these

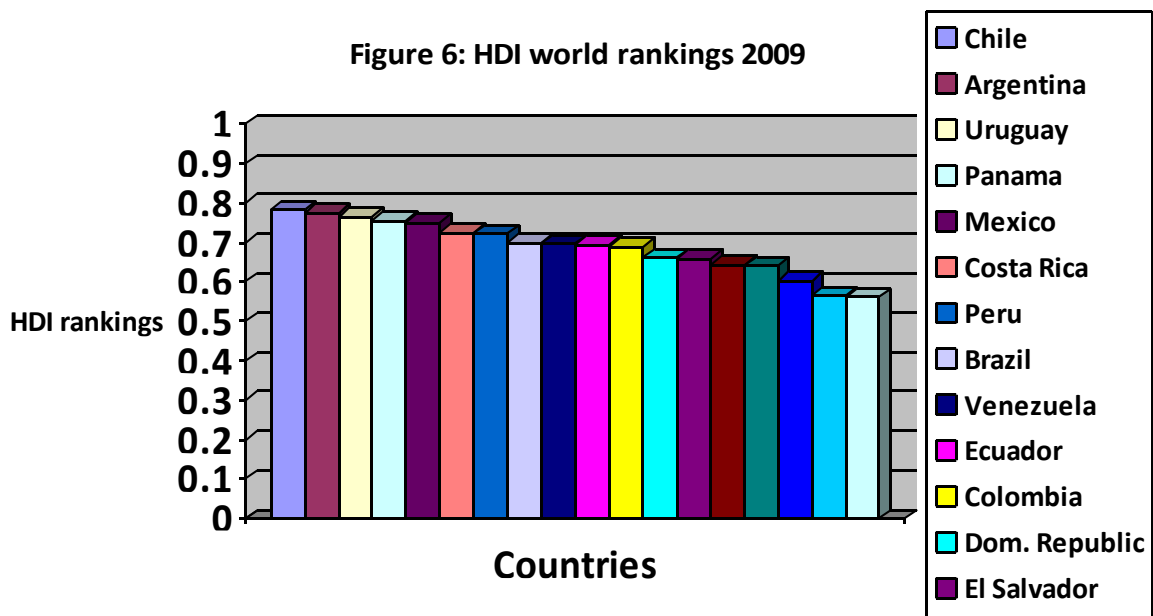
| World Ranking | Country | HDI Score |
|---------------|--------------------|-----------|
| 45 | Chile (1) | .783 |
| 46 | Argentina (2) | .775 |
| 52 | Uruguay (3) | .765 |
| 54 | Panama (4) | .755 |
| 56 | Mexico (5) | .750 |
| 62 | Costa Rica (6) | .725 |
| 63 | Peru (7) | .723 |
| 73 | Brazil (8) | .699 |
| 75 | Venezuela (9) | .696 |
| 77 | Ecuador (10) | .695 |
| 79 | Colombia (11) | .689 |
| 88 | Dom. Republic (12) | .663 |
| 90 | El Salvador (13) | .659 |
| 95 | Bolivia (14) | .643 |
| 96 | Paraguay (15) | .640 |
| 106 | Honduras (16) | .604 |
| 115 | Nicaragua (17) | .565 |
| 116 | Guatemala (18) | .560 |

**Figure 5:
HDI World Rankings 2009**

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Graph and data: Heredero, Liliat. "El Índice de Desarrollo Humano tiene una nueva cara, ¿Pero sirve?" *BBC Mundo*. November 4, 2010.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/mundo/noticias/2010/11/101102_informe_desarrollo_humano_pnud_in.shtml (accessed November 4, 2010).



indices, making it, by measurement, “the most unequal region on earth.”²⁵ This is a shocking conclusion, but one by which the UNDP stands, stating that it reflects both the cultural as well as institutional inequality that affect the residents of Latin America, most especially women.

All is not lost, however. Despite these unhappy figures, Latin America has still made great strides as compared to its rankings in 1970. Life expectancy has increased from 60 to 74 years, and education rates have increased from 52% to 83%.²⁶ Additionally, in the last forty years virtually all Latin countries have gone up in HDI rankings, with Brazil, Bolivia and Guatemala taking the lead. There is still much to be done, but progress is being made.

Final Words on Latin America

Latin America, not unlike most regions of the world, has made great progress towards further equality and empowerment for women. Birth rates have fallen as education rates have increased, and women are more able to play an active role in supporting their families as well as pursuing goals outside the home. More and more women are pursuing political roles as well—including the presidency—giving women a greater voice in government than they have ever before experienced.

²⁵ Ibin

²⁶ Ibin

However, the work is far from over. Both cultural and institutional barriers remain in place and serve as obstacles for women to be fully empowered within their societies. Gender roles are still somewhat rigidly defined and difficult to break and as such many women are still unable to access the education and work opportunities that they are entitled to. In addition, the difference of culture and access between rural and urban women means that often those in the former group are left behind.

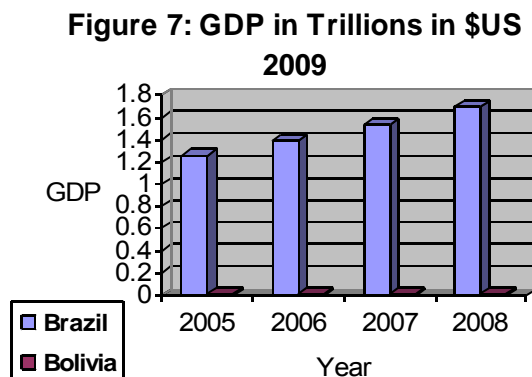
In conclusion, while women have achieved much and society has made significant steps, there is still severe inequality and women face many difficulties in accessing the opportunities they deserve.

A GENERAL COMPARISON: BRAZIL AND BOLIVIA

While we have explored Latin America as a whole in the context of women's empowerment and development, we find it still more compelling to pursue this comparison on a more micro level. Specifically, we wonder whether Brazil—whose booming economy and growing global presence has made its ascent into the realms of the world's most powerful nations almost a forgone conclusion—will exhibit a significantly higher rate of women's empowerment in these sectors than some of its neighboring states—specifically, Bolivia. This Andean nation is significantly poorer than its larger neighbor and is far behind Brazil in terms of development and global significance. Will it display a much lower rate of development among women as a consequence? In the following section we will pursue this comparison as well as a reflection on how reliable global assumptions of “development” are when compared to the true realities faced by women in these societies.

General Comparison

Before we can begin an in depth look at women in Brazil and Bolivia, we must first get a sense of where each country stands as defined by general development trends. In terms of GDP, Brazil is well beyond Bolivia's level of production. Converted to current US dollar value, the graph above shows GDP levels in both countries over recent years, as reported by the International Monetary Fund.²⁷ As



²⁷ *International Financial Statistics Yearbook 2009*, Vol. LXII 2009. International Monetary Fund, 2009.



is clearly evident, Bolivia's GDP (at .011, .013, .015 and .017 in trillions of US dollars each respective year) cannot compare to that of Brazil.

In 2009, Brazil's GDP was measured at \$US 2.013 trillion in Purchasing Power Parity, ranking as the 10th economy in the world and the first in South America. Though suffering from a -2% growth rate due to the financial crisis of the last two years, the Brazilian Central Bank does anticipate a 5% growth rate for 2010. Bolivia's GDP, on the other hand, was measured at \$45.56 billion, ranking it at 91st in the world, with a growth rate of 3.3%. Though still ranked 8th out of 12 in South America by GDP, Bolivia remains one of the "poorest and least developed" countries in the region.²⁸

While this difference in GDP is an important factor to note, it does not give us the entire economic picture of each country. For that we must look at a few other measures in relation to GDP that are quite telling. First, it is important to note the general distribution of GDP in the workforce. As mentioned earlier in this paper with respect to the employment of women, there are three fundamental sectors in the economy: agriculture, manufacturing and services. In measuring GDP distribution among these three sectors, we see that in Brazil services take the lead, with 68.5% of GDP originating in this sector as compared to 25.4% in industry and 6.1% in agriculture. In terms of labor distribution this pattern in matched, with 20% of total labor force employed in agriculture, 14% in industry and 66% in services. This pattern makes for a heavily service oriented (and mostly urban) total economy.

In Bolivia, on the other hand, the layout is fundamentally different. While GDP distribution follows the same pattern as Brazil with 11.3% of GDP coming from agriculture, 36.9% from industry and 51.8% from services, these numbers are more spread out than in its larger neighbor. In terms of labor distribution, we see a much more obvious difference, with 17% of labor centered in industry, 40% and 43% in agriculture and services respectively, nearly tying the two. This makes for a heavily agricultural (therefore rural) economy, making Bolivia much more susceptible to issues of rural poverty and subsistence farming than its larger, more urban neighbor. The following graphs reflect these distributions visually to stress these fundamental differences.²⁹

²⁸ Ranking data: CIA World Factbook, Bolivia and Brazil pages, GDP comparisons <http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/> (accessed October 11, 2010).

²⁹ Ibin (GDP and Labor distribution data)

Figure 8: GDP Distribution by Sector 2009

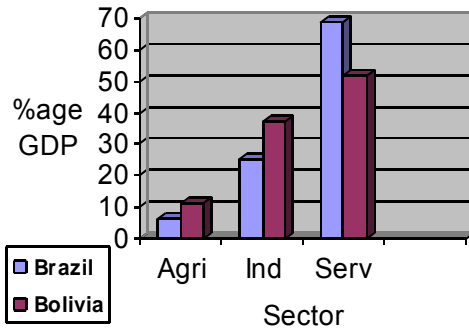
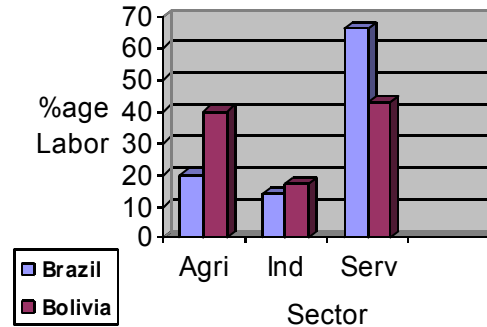


Figure 9: Labor Distribution by Sector 2009



In addition to this information, there is still further data to call attention to. Though unemployment rates are nearly identical in each country (Brazil 8.1% and Bolivia 8.5% in 2009), Per Capita Income is greatly varied, reflecting the differing concentration of labor in sectors that either produce high income jobs (services) or low income ones (agriculture). In Brazil, PCI was \$US 10,000 in 2009, ranking this country 107th in the world, whereas in Bolivia it was only \$US 4,700, gaining the rank of 146th in the world.³⁰ This difference is also reflected in the fact that while 26% of Brazil's population lived below the poverty line in 2008, 60% of Bolivia's did so (Note: the term "poverty line" refers to the income below which it is impossible for an individual or family to purchase all resources required to live. It varies from country to country).³¹

However, while this data would lead one to believe that, though Brazil still suffers from economic inequality, there is much greater prosperity and distribution of goods there than Bolivia, this is not entirely the case. In terms of total consumption by percentage share of the upper and lower 10% of the population-- that is, what percent of total consumption is done by the upper versus the lower 10%--the countries are relatively equal. In Brazil, the lowest 10% consume 1.1% of total consumption, while the upper 10% consume 43%. In Bolivia, the lower 10% consume .5% while the upper 10% are responsible for 44.1% of total national consumption.³²

This brief overview of Brazil and Bolivia is designed to impart a general understanding of overall conditions in each country before delving into issues of gender already laid out in this paper. The picture painted shows us that while Brazil is unquestionably far ahead of Bolivia in strictly economic terms, there is still rampant poverty and generally inequality, in many cases on par with its poorer neighbor. We now turn to see if this pattern holds true in the categories of women's empowerment: education, health and family, labor and economy and political activism.

³⁰ Ibin

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Education

In general, both Brazil and Bolivia reflect the patterns of improved literacy and education among girls and women that we saw measured for Latin America as a whole. In Brazil, total adult literacy among women is 88.8%, slightly higher than its male counterpart at 88.4%. Bolivia, on the other hand, does suffer from a notable inequality—though still an improvement--on this front, with only an 80% adult literacy rate among women, compared to 93.1% among men.³³ However, compare this number to the literacy rate measured only among youths (age 15-24) and you see substantial progress, with 96% of girls and 99% of boys reaching literacy. Brazil too experiences growth, with 98% of girls and 96% of boys considered literate.³⁴

In terms of school enrollment, Brazil and Bolivia again show relative numeric equality. In 1994, 95% of both Brazilian boys and girls were enrolled in primary school, and in 2004 girls made up 47% of total primary school enrollment. In Bolivia, 96% of girls and 94% of boys were enrolled in 1994 and in 2004 girls made up 49% of enrollment. In terms of secondary school, Brazil pulls slightly ahead, with 81% of girls and 75% of boys enrolled in 2004 and girls making up 52% of total enrollment, while Bolivia counts with 72% of girls and 73% of boys enrolled, with girls making up 48% of total enrollment that same year.³⁵

Where the difference exists is in terms of the quality of education offered and access available for all citizens. In Brazil, though still a nation coping with severe poverty and inequality issues, women on average are completing more years in school than their male counterparts at their socioeconomic level, a trend that began in the 1980s. This can be seen clearly in the level of education among the labor force, with only 12% of economically active women having less than one year of schooling, versus 18% of men. In addition, 30% of working women have had nine or more years of schooling, compared to only 20% of men. By 1990 this trend was prevalent in virtually all regions of the country, even in areas of poverty.³⁶

Conversely, according to USAID, though “education for Bolivian women has improved in recent decades, women’s positions are still very unequal to those of men.”³⁷ This is due primarily to the fact that the Bolivian education system has some of the worst

³³ Ibin (male/female literacy)

³⁴ Supra 11 (youth literacy)

³⁵ Ibin (school rates)

³⁶ “Economic Opportunities and labor Conditions for Women-Perspectives from Latin America: Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil.” *USAID Office of Women in Development* (April 2003).

³⁷ Ibin, Pg 1

deficiencies in the region, stemming from the underlying factors of race, gender and social status. For indigenous, rural women—who are affected by all three factors—education is severely restrained. Because of this, these women suffer the highest rate of illiteracy in Bolivia, and many who speak only their native tongue never have a formal education in Spanish.³⁸

In both countries, education has a direct effect on all remaining categories—health and family, economics and politics. Though both have progressed, there are still pockets for improvement, even as Brazil has made decidedly more progress in these areas than Bolivia.

Health and Family

For women in the developing world, health is most often directly associated with family size and overall wellbeing. This is no different in Brazil and Bolivia, where there is still much work to be done.

In Brazil there has been a great deal of progress in women's health overall, although there continues to be a great deal of inequality, especially in poor regions and among black or mulatto women. In Bolivia, the situation is much more troubling. Though there has been a great deal of progress since the 1950s, conditions for women at that time were so poor that even today, according to USAID, Bolivian women “are part of a health crisis that is among the most troubling in all of Latin America.”³⁹

One important measure to consider is the total fertility rate. This number can directly affect mortality rates both for mothers and children, as the fewer children a woman has, the more likely it is that she has access to medical care and the stronger her body is likely to be. As in the rest of Latin America, fertility rates in these countries have been steadily falling, holding now at 2.19 children per woman in Brazil (ranked 118th in the world from highest to lowest) and 3.07 in Bolivia (ranked 66th).⁴⁰ However, it is important to note that in Brazil much of this decline has taken place amid great controversy. Among poor women, who are less likely to have access to contraceptives, many have turned to mass sterilization as a way to control family size. This is particularly troubling, as these practices are rarely safe and can in fact be quite dangerous.

It is important that we also consider total infant and maternal mortality. Infant mortality is defined as the total number of deaths before the age of 1 per every 1000 live births. In Brazil this number has hovered at 24 for the last five years, whereas in Bolivia it has held at 46. Maternal mortality, defined as the number of maternal deaths related to pregnancy, birth or post-partum complications per 100,000 live births in one year, was 260 in Brazil in the year 2000, and more than 420 in Bolivia the same year.⁴¹ As we can see, in Bolivia, these numbers are excessively high. Again according to USAID, this is primarily due to

³⁸ Ibin, Pg 1

³⁹ Ibin, Pg 1

⁴⁰ Supra 28



lack of access among women to medical coverage during pregnancy and childbirth and a continued lack of coverage for their children.⁴² It is important to remember, however, that maternal mortality occurs most often among poor women and is often underreported. These figures, therefore, must be taken with some skepticism as the total number is likely to be higher in actuality.

But all is not negative. In terms of total life expectancy, both countries fall in line with general global trends that are showing women, on average, living longer than men—a direct reflection on health and access to medical care. In Brazil, total life expectancy at birth among women is 75.73 years compared to 68.43 years for men. In Bolivia, life expectancy at birth for women is 69.7 years versus 64.2 years for men.⁴³

Additionally, both countries have seen a push among women to marry later in life. In both Brazil and Bolivia, the mean age of marriage in the mid-1990s was 23 years for women and 25 for men.⁴⁴ This not only encourages women to begin families at a later date (compared to beginning during teenage years which for decades was not uncommon) but also allows women to continue their education and enter the workforce with more ease.

Labor and Economics

As in most of the world, women in Brazil and Bolivia continue to face discrimination in employment and pay.

In Brazil, women have made significant headway beginning first and foremost with the education levels already discussed in this paper. From there, it is noteworthy that more women than men are employed as salaried workers on a national level and that more women work as clerks and salespeople in urban areas, while men continue to be the primary workers in the agricultural sector (Note: rates of women's employment in agriculture go up in predominantly rural provinces). It is also worth noting that “there is a high percentage of technical specialists and professionals among women” which is on par with the rate in Latin America as a whole.⁴⁵

In Bolivia beginning in the 1990s almost 40% of the active labor force consisted of women. These women were primarily employed as “own account” workers—in other words, in the informal sector—(36.4% in 2002) or else as employees in family businesses (34.8% in 2002). Compared to Brazil (where only 9.1% of women were employed in family businesses and 22.9% as “own account” employees in 2004) these numbers are much higher, due to the fact that more Brazilian women are employed in the more lucrative and formal services sector than their Bolivian counterparts. In addition, the scope of women's

⁴¹ Supra 11

⁴² Supra 36, Pg 1

⁴³ Supra 28

⁴⁴ Supra 11

⁴⁵ Supra 36, Pg 4

activity in Bolivia was described by USAID as being “quite limited,” especially in terms of real access to all levels of employment.⁴⁶

However, discrimination can still be found in *both* countries. Since 1992, Bolivian women have been paid only 50% of total salaries paid to men for the same work, and in Brazil, women received 62% of the wage paid a man in 2002. In addition, although women made up 44% and 43% of the total labor force in Bolivia and Brazil respectively in 2006, they suffered from a much higher unemployment rate as compared to men, as can be seen in the graph below.⁴⁷

In addition, women made up only 2.2% and 2.5% of employers in Bolivia and Brazil respectively in the early 2000s, making it clear that in both countries there continues to exist a “glass ceiling” that is difficult for women to break through.⁴⁸

Another statistic of interest when considering the treatment of women in employment is the length and pay of maternity leave offered in each country. This information can be very telling as it is a clue as to how easy it is for a mother to return to work in these societies. In both countries, maternity leave benefits are provided by the state social security system. For Bolivia, this amounts to 60 days leave at 70-100% pay, whereas in Brazil it is 120 days at 100% pay. While there are certainly countries around the world that provide more, these rates are still comparable to much of the developing world and even, in Brazil's case, slightly higher.⁴⁹

While both countries have made significant progress over the last several decades (again, with Brazil taking the overall lead), it is evident that there still remains much to be done in terms of women's equality and opportunity in the workforce. To be fair, this remains true even in the developed world as women continue to confront discriminatory labor practices.

Political Activism

As shown earlier in this paper, women's participation in the political sphere is quickly increasing in Latin America.

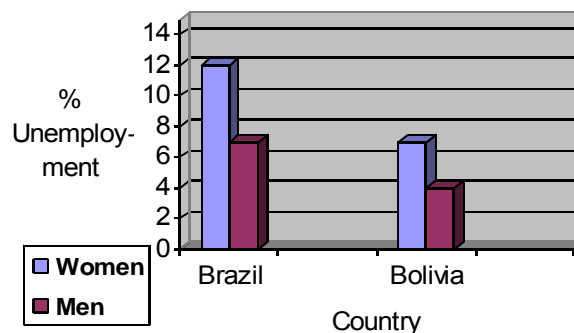
⁴⁶ Supra 11 and Supra 36, Pg 1

⁴⁷ Supra 11 (graph info) and Supra 36, Pg 1

⁴⁸ Supra 11

⁴⁹ Ibin

Figure 10: Unemployment Rates by Sex 2006





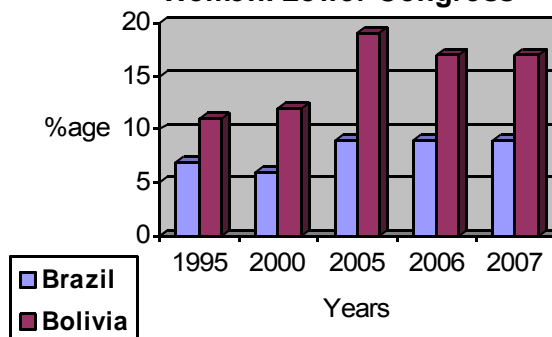
In Brazil, various women's organizations have emerged both on a local and national level, creating a strong regional feminist movement. Groups such as the National Council for Women's Rights and the Brazilian Women's Articulation have been key in lobbying for legislation in line with the goals of the Beijing Women's Conference and for progressive reforms to the Brazilian Constitution.⁵⁰ Just recently, Brazil's political future was discussed internationally as the country elected Dilma Rousseff as its first female President.

In Bolivia, key efforts have been made to include women in the political sphere. By law at least 30% of candidates for public office must be women and in 2005 rural women made headlines along with the rest of rural Bolivia by voting in record numbers for Bolivia's first indigenous President, Evo Morales. Bolivia has even had a female interim President, Lidia Gueiler Tejada (1979-80), though she was removed from office in a coup before new elections could be held. However, USAID is quick to note that in reality, the ability of Bolivian women to be involved in "productive activities and decision-making can be described as incipient at best."⁵¹

One relevant measure of women's empowerment in the political system is the number of women who hold government seats. By no means do all women vote or legislate alike and there is no such thing as one "women's vote" as all women are individuals and behave as such. However, women in office are more likely than men to focus on issues that are of particular importance to women and legislate in favor of equal treatment for both sexes. In this vein, the graph below shows the percentage of seats in the lower houses of congress in both countries that have been held by women since 1995:⁵²

It is interesting to note in this graph that while international aid agencies such as USAID hold that empowerment of women in Bolivia is quite low, especially in comparison to Brazil, in each year surveyed above a higher percentage of women held seats in the lower house of Congress in Bolivia than in Brazil.

Figure 11: Percentage of Seats Held by Women: Lower Congress



⁵⁰ Htun, Mala. "Puzzles of Women's Rights in Brazil." *Social Research*. Fall, 2002.

http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2267/is_3_69/ai_94227139/pg_2/?tag (accessed October 18, 2010).

⁵¹ Supra 36, Pg 1

⁵² Supra 11

Quick Notes on HDI, GDI and GEM

A brief mention should be made here concerning HDI, GDI and GEM scores in Bolivia and Brazil, as defined earlier in this paper. These scores serve as an excellent summation of the state of development in a given country, and the latter two provide an excellent framework for understanding the overall state of women's equality in the state.

In 2007, Brazil's GDI score of .810 was 99.6% of its HDI score (.813). Out of 155 countries that have both scores, only 24 had a better ratio between scores than Brazil. One of those, interestingly enough, is Bolivia. With an HDI score of .729 and a GDI of .728 in 2007, its GDI was 99.9% of its HDI and out of 155 countries, only 18 had a better ratio.⁵³ This ratio is important to note, as the closer GDI is to HDI, the more equal the society is considered to be.

Though Bolivia should be proud of having such a close ratio, despite the issues of inequality already discussed in this paper, it is still clear that Brazil scores higher overall on HDI and GDI scales (Brazil's HDI score falls into the High Human Development category whereas Bolivia's is still considered Medium Human Development).⁵⁴

It is interesting too to consider the following graph, which charts some areas of measurement in GDI from 2004. Here, these measurements show the female "value" as a percentage of the male score (e.g. Brazilian women have a life expectancy that is 110.7% that of males). In these values, we see a summation of many of the statistics we have already encountered in this paper, and see that women in Brazil have consistently scored a higher overall percentage than men, whereas in Bolivia there is still much to be done to "catch up."

| Country | Life expectancy at birth | Adult literacy rate | Combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrollment |
|---------|--------------------------|---------------------|---|
| Brazil | 110.7% | 100.5% | 105.0% |
| Bolivia | 106.7% | 89.5% | 93.3% |

Figure 12: Comparative measurements—female scores as % male⁵⁵

However, in terms of GEM measurements (or the level of female active participation in economic and political life) Bolivia again outranks Brazil. This is not surprising when we

⁵³ Supra 8

⁵⁴ Supra 7

⁵⁵ Supra 8



consider statistics previously discussed in this paper, where we saw that Bolivia has higher percentages of women in political office and participating in the labor force (even if they are doing so at low paying jobs). Bolivia's GEM score of .511 ranks 78th out of 109 countries, whereas Brazil's score of .504 ranks 82nd.⁵⁶

CONCLUSIONS

In analyzing all of the statistics listed above in all relevant gender categories, we can see clearly that both Bolivia and Brazil have demonstrated the patterns of development in women's empowerment that have been prevalent worldwide. From higher education rates leading to lower fertility rates, to access to employment and political activism, we see women in both of these countries making great progress and yet still facing substantial obstacles.

In Brazil, we do see an overall better situation for women than in Bolivia; a finding in line with what we would expect in a country that has so outflanked its neighbors in terms of general growth and development. However, it was surprising to find just how little actually separated the situation of Brazilian women versus their Bolivian counterparts in some instances, and even to see that in some categories, Bolivia has actually made more comparative progress than Brazil.

The lesson to learn here is that the empowerment of women cannot be overlooked, and a country cannot be considered truly developed without substantial growth in this area. Women are a pivotal part of society on all levels and have much to contribute. As workers, politicians, and educated citizens, their standing in society will either push their country forward or else hold it back, and in the end, they will be the source of any substantial transformation that takes place.⁵⁷ As UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon stressed at a recent conference, "whether we are discussing sustainable development, public health or peace, women are at the core."⁵⁸

In both Brazil and Bolivia—two countries on the opposite ends of the economic spectrum—there is still much work to be done. However, we must strongly acknowledge the great progress that has been made, both by everyday citizens and government structures to ensure that women have a more and more equal role in society. For Brazil, this will be the final frontier of ensuring their place among the world's most developed nations; for Bolivia, it will be a powerful step into bringing growth and change to a small and developing nation.

⁵⁶ Ibin

⁵⁷ "International Day of Rural Women." *IFAD*. October 15, 2010. http://www.ifad.org/media/events/2010/women_rural.htm (accessed October 20, 2010)

⁵⁸ "Women integral to peace, Ban stresses." *UN News Centre*. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=36526&Cr=&Cr1> (accessed October 25, 2010).

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