



## CHAPTER SEVEN

# ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN

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## PURVIEW OF THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN

The Economic and Social Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) is one of five regional commissions of the Economic and Social Commission and represents countries in both Latin American and the Caribbean. ECLAC supports the economic development of its member states by reinforcing economic relationships among its members and other countries of the world. It does so by promoting developmental cooperative activities and projects of regional and subregional scope, bringing a regional perspective to global problems and translating global concerns at the regional and subregional levels. ECLAC also has as one of its primary objectives the promotion of the region's social development.

**Website:** [www.eclac.cl/default.asp?idioma=IN](http://www.eclac.cl/default.asp?idioma=IN)

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

Latin America and the Caribbean has long been a global leader on sustainable development, in part because of the unique role the Amazon and other rainforests play in the region. Maintaining biodiversity has been a priority, and every Member State in the region has ratified the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity. Some Member States in the region have even enshrined environmental protections into their constitutions. This emphasis on sustainability has created tension with the rapid and intense urbanization in the region. Over the last two decades, Latin America and the Caribbean has become the most urbanized region in the world, with more than 80 percent of the population living in urban areas. The process has been accelerated by the migration of tens of millions of people who have moved from rural areas to cities across Latin America. UN-HABITAT projects that 90 percent of the population in Latin America and the Caribbean will live in urban areas by 2050; Brazil and the Southern Cone will reach 90 percent urbanization by 2020.

While urbanization offers potential benefits—increased individual earnings, the growth of industry and easier access to and delivery of social services—for both citizens and governments, there are also serious challenges. The intense concentration of people in urban areas has serious, deleterious effects on the environment. Urban areas produce large amounts of solid and hazardous waste, increase air and water pollution, and degrade coastlines and rivers. Urban dwellers tend to consume more food, energy and durable goods than rural populations. Diseases tend to spread more readily in urban areas than rural areas. Natural disasters do significantly greater damage in urban areas, where population density is greater. Finally, overcrowding, lack of infrastructure and urban sprawl all tend to disproportionately affect the poorest urban populations.

In response, governments are increasingly developing sustainable urban development policies aimed at ensuring that the environment is protected and that all members of society benefit from urbanization. The discussion on the issue began in earnest in 1992, when the United Nations held the UN Conference on Environment and Development (the Rio Earth Summit) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. While there had been previous UN conferences on environmental issues, the Rio Earth Summit sought to create a new paradigm of development that balanced social and economic progress with environmental protection. The meeting was widely attended by heads of state and government, and the new paradigm of sustainable development has since become a core tenet of the United Nations' work around the world. The Rio Earth Summit also produced Agenda 21, a global action plan for sustainable development.

Following the Rio Earth Summit, much of the work on sustainable development shifted to UN specialized and technical agencies, to regional bodies like the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and to Member States. Building upon Agenda 21, many Member States prepared national action plans or strategies to integrate sustainable development into the work of their governments. These sustainable development strategies almost inevitably rely on urbanization. Years of UN data suggest that urbanization



is strongly linked to economic development. Consequently, much of Member States' work on sustainable development is focused on creating sustainable cities. UN specialized agencies have played a supporting role by offering governments expertise, technical capacity-building and programmatic assistance in implementing their national goals. UN-HABITAT has provided the most support, though its work is primarily focused on providing expertise and technical assistance. The United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Development Programme offer on-the-ground programmatic assistance, helping countries develop national efforts in areas like sustainable forestry bio-fuel and sustainable agriculture.

In 2004, ECLAC held a meeting of ministers responsible for housing and urban development focused on sustainable development of human settlements. The meeting focused on three key areas: supporting the development of employment and dynamic urban economies, addressing issues related to slums, and improving land-use planning. To support governments working in these areas, ECLAC has included sustainable development and human settlements as a component of its programme of work. In 2010, the ECLAC Secretariat released its most recent iteration, which focused efforts in two areas: (1) assisting the region to prepare for and adapt to climate change, including through disaster risk reduction, and (2) assisting governments to integrate sustainability criteria into public policies, particularly urbanization policy, land-use policy and environmental management. ECLAC is also working with other regional organizations to ensure that sustainability is an issue considered in trade discussions in the region. In 2012, the United Nations returned to Rio de Janeiro for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). Rio+20 reviewed the progress achieved since the Earth Summit and proposed an ambitious new agenda on sustainable development. ECLAC will need to consider how the Rio+20 outcome document changes work in the region on sustainable development, if at all.

This year, ECLAC will need to reconsider its priorities and determine what new or emerging issues might warrant being addressed. Unemployment is at near-record lows in Latin America, and the body might consider what alternative initiatives could further spur economic growth while balancing protection of the environment. Disaster risk reduction continues to be a major area of interest, yet little action has been taken to insulate the region's urban areas from the effects of climate change. While Latin America has not suffered as badly as other world regions, creating sustainable urban development will continue to be a challenge in the region. Above all, ECLAC will need to consider how to balance its continued rapid urbanization with protecting the quality of the environment, particularly the Amazon and its unique biodiversity.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include the following:

- How can the region best balance economic growth, environmental quality and social equity?
- How can Member States better incorporate sustainability into their policies at all levels? What policies are emerging as best practices that might be applicable for the region?
- How can the region spur economic growth while protecting environmental quality and biodiversity?

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## REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

In the region and around the world, women face more limited access to education, employment and political representation than men. Women comprise only 22 percent of the region's political leaders. Without adequate representation in the political environment, women are often subject to the whims of their government without the ability to shape the agenda. Economically, women remain in risk of poverty due to the lack of employment opportunities and are often not paid for domestic work. Women in the region enjoy only about 60 percent of the economic prosperity of men and also face disparity in access to agricultural resources. In the developing world, land farmed by women typically produces 20 to 30 percent less yield than land farmed by men. Although progress has been made in the areas of economic participation, education and political representation, there is still a considerable disparity between men and women globally.

While gender equality has long been on the agenda at the United Nations, it only became a major international priority following the



1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Since then, the United Nations has taken an increasing interest in pushing Member States to improve gender equality in all areas. Some of this work has been at the political level, including at the UN General Assembly, and through technical support work.

Since the Beijing conference, numerous UN bodies and agencies have taken steps to support gender equality. The UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women supports organizations, States, their citizens and other groups that strengthen victims' voices and human rights through engagement and proactive awareness campaigns. The fund works in cooperation with campaigns such as the "UNiTE to End Violence against Women" campaign, which is supported by the Secretary-General. The UN Commission on the Status of Women's most recent Agreed Conclusions strongly urge Member States to condemn violence toward women and girls and to do their best at discovering, securing and prosecuting those accused of such violence so as to end impunity and increase transparency, accountability and the reinforcement of implementing strong legal practices.

ECLAC's work on gender equality has primarily focused on reducing the economic disparities between men and women. The Regional Conference on Women was designed to report and commit to the ideas of gender equality and empowerment in the regions and sub-regions of Latin America and the Caribbean. While not a UN organization, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has been heavily involved in this area, adopting in 2010 an Operational Policy on Gender Equality and Development. The IDB contributes funds toward monitoring the participation of women in political institutions; originates direct loans and grants to organizations that promote gender equality; and works to mainstream gender equality into all its loans. At the 2012 session of the Meeting of Ministers for Women's Affairs for ECLAC, the body declared that future goals regarding economic empowerment, usage of information and communications technologies (ICTs) and gender equality should include physical and economic autonomy for women and an increase in female participation in decision-making. In August 2012 ECLAC adopted a resolution that encouraged greater inclusion in public policy with the goals of strengthening development in the region. It also adopted a second resolution acknowledging progress in supporting gender equality, gender affairs and South-South cooperation within ECLAC.

In the near future, potential actions by ECLAC may involve sustainability initiatives such as long-term national and regional policies that are aimed at fostering human rights, freedoms for individuals, and communities as a whole. Pursuing the eradication of poverty, robust and sustained economic growth, and an increased quality of growth as it relates to the decrease in HIV/AIDS infection rates among women are all potential means of creating a more just and equitable civil society. Although much progress has been made toward greater education and empowerment of women, the work is not yet completed: there is a need for better provision of access and resources. One area of opportunity to close the economic gender gap in the region is through providing better resources to women farmers. Transfer of technology within Latin America and the Caribbean could also be used to specifically benefit women. Promotion of intra-regional cooperation among regional and sub-regional Member States will lead to better opportunities to advance the issues that women face and will better implement the mainstreaming of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include the following:

How can regional Member States effectively promote gender equality mainstreaming? What aspects of Latin America and the Caribbean will present unique challenges and opportunities in the area of improving gender equality?

- How can ECLAC cooperate with private regional organizations such as the Inter-American Development Bank to amplify the effect of its policies regarding economic development and gender equality?
- In which ways does the empowering of women promote sustainable economic growth for Member States?

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