

COUNTRY REPORT: VENEZUELA 2006-2012

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Caracas, January 15th, 2014

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INTRODUCTION

From December 18th, 1979 when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Venezuelan state shows its willingness to sign it on July 17th, 1980, one year before being signed by other 19 countries, allowing its entry into force on September 3rd, 1981, and ratified by Venezuela on May 2nd, 1983. It should be noted that since 1989 the Convention has the backing of more than 100 countries.

From 1983 until today three decades have passed and Venezuela has experienced profound changes in its political, economic, cultural and social model, including the process of re-foundation of the Republic through a new Constitution adopted by popular referendum in 1999. With the entry into force of the new Constitution, began an unprecedented process of participation of the people and therefore of women in various spheres of political and social life of the country. It is important to note that the new Constitution establishes the principle of equality and non-discrimination in Article 21, having constitutional and domestic rule rank the provisions of this Convention, in accordance with Article 23 thereof.

Venezuela, from our point of view and experiences in the women's movement, as a State party to this Convention, has been progressively complying with the provisions of Article 3 "...shall take in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guarantee them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with men".

Another example are the legislative developments to guarantee the human rights of women in education, workplace, maternity protection, violence, social security, specifically expressed in the Law of responsible Maternity and Paternity (2009), the Organic Law of Education (2009), the Organic Law of Labor, Men and Women Workers, (2012), Law on the Right of Women to a Life Free of Violence (2009), Law against Racial Discrimination (2011), Special Law for Dignified Refugees (2011).

The changes that have been occurring in Venezuela since 1999 are obvious and unstoppable and they are oriented towards social justice, inclusion, solidarity, priority of the collective, recognition of the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic roots that mark its historical development, and the rehabilitation of the role of the State as a driver of changes aimed at achieving an endogenous, comprehensive, independent and sovereign economic and social development, which principles are included in the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and the Outline of the Plan for

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Economic and Social Development of the Nation 2001-2007, 2007-2013. this last document entered in the National Project Simon Bolivar, whose centerpiece is the ethical and moral re-foundation of the Venezuelan Nation.

The **Plan of the Nation, 2013-2019**, approved in 2013 by the National Assembly, previously discussed with the People's Power and hence, Law of the Bolivarian Republic, deepens the strategic lines of the First Socialist Plan of the Nation Simón Bolívar and paves the way for the transition to the Bolivarian socialism of the XXI century. All these documents express the importance of education for democratic citizenship training.

During the last ten years, Venezuela has experienced profound changes that have resulted in the recognition, vindication, and institutionalization of policies for women, based on proposals of fairness, equality, solidarity, activism and active participation in the public sphere. Women are key grassroots in the work of the revolutionary process base, and as such, are active in the construction of the New Homeland that is also a woman.

In the case of the rural economy, rural women have played a major role, its participation in the agricultural sector is vital, contributing greatly to the eradication of poverty and hunger. In Venezuela, women engaged in agriculture have important functions, because they contribute to household food security, income earners, caring for the family, dealing with the management of natural resources and biodiversity.

With regard to gender-based violence for the 70's, 80's and even early 90's of last century, just 40 years ago in Venezuela, were fundamentally the feminist and women's movements who made visible, questioned and provided assistance to the violence against them. In 1998, with the promulgation of the Law on Violence Against Women and Families, which entered into force in January 1999, is when the government began to intervene such violence but without the creation of specialized services.

In 1999, with the adoption of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, we obtained the greatest achievement, which marked a milestone in the history of women's struggles in our country, to make visible women and mainstreaming the gender perspective. It is from the year 2007 with the approval of the Organic Law on the Right of Women to a Life Free of Violence when, in our country, begins a process of implementation of specialized services for women victims of violence.

The WIDF for this report has agreed to address the following issues: political participation of women, gender-based violence, education, communes and food sovereignty.

THE CONVENTION AND THE OBLIGATIONS OF STATES PARTIES

PARTICIPATION IN THE PUBLIC LIFE AND POLITICS (Art. 7)

The sustained struggle of organized women coupled with the political will of a State Party to a Convention that imposes rights and obligations, has facilitated progressively the increase of guarantees for our participation in public and political life. Thus, in our country there are no restrictions of any kind so that women can choose (from 1947) and be eligible "in all elections and public referenda and to all agencies whose members are subject to public election". In this sense, aware as we are of the consecration of our rights, we maintain our struggle to break down the cultural barriers that still exist in the Venezuelan society which obey to the unsettled equality by women and men due to the existence of the patriarchal culture. In this struggle against patriarchy we are joined by the Venezuelan state, whose challenge or strategic objective is to build a society of equals, expressed in the Homeland Plan 2013-2019, understanding that the realization of this Plan is immanent to the participation of women, so we are co-responsible and key actors in their realization.

Since the triumph of the Bolivarian Revolution, the participation of women in the formulation and implementation of public policies has reached unparalleled dimensions in the history of the Venezuelan governments. The political leadership of the revolution shows the assessment of skills and ethical principles of women to public management, although we are aware that we should follow the path towards parity and further optimization in the awareness of men and women so they can access more areas of decision making. During these 15 years of revolution, indicators show an increasing participation of women in public affairs, expressed in the appointment to positions in the period between 2007 and 2012, as quoted below: 19 women have been ministers, the more prominent among them, the Minister of Defense, the Supreme Court, the National Electoral Council (4 Heads of 5, including the Chair), Heads of the Citizen Power (Procurator General, Comptroller and Ombudsman), Attorney General of the Republic (2011), Presidency of the Central Bank of Venezuela, Head of Government of the Capital District Region, out of 7 Integral Defense Regions (Redi, in Spanish) 3 are headed by women.

As for elected office in the period 2008 to 2017, we have: of 24 Governorates, 2 Governors (2008) of 12 postulated, 4 Governors (2012) of 7 postulated, 27 main deputies, equivalent to 16.33% and 39 alternate deputies, i.e., the 23.63% of the National Assembly, 3 deputies to the Latin American Parliament; 52 women mayors were elected in 2008, which represents 15.52% and 54 in 2013, i.e., 16.02%. In the

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Legislative councils, 56 women were elected main legislators in 2008 which represents 24.03% and in 2012 were elected 94 main legislators for a 40.34%.

The aforementioned indicators reflect the need to continue promoting and encouraging the participation of women in popular election scenarios, which implies a permanent monitoring of the life of political parties and the creation of favorable conditions for the inclusion of women on the lists and electoral constituencies, in places that ensure the possibility of being elected and to advance the momentum of a law guaranteeing the construction of parity. Each day increases women's organizations of fact and law motivated by the need to participate in public and political life of the country in diverse subject areas such as: human rights, indigenous issues, peasants, Afro-descendants, fishers, artisans, gender, movement of settlers, functional diversity, environmentalists, culture, sports, communication, peace and life. We emphasize that the Venezuelan Government promotes and encourages social participation of women and men and upon proof of legal and institutional requirements.

Education for inclusion, equality and social justice.

The 1999 Constitution guarantees free education up to the level of undergraduate college; education is recognized as a public good, human right and unavoidable responsibility of the State. The net enrollment rate of initial education among 1999-2008 increased up to 24%. The relationship of equality between boys and girls in 2008 was 100, 8 girls for every 100 boys, in the case of primary education by the year 2008, included more than 1 million children. The relationship of equality for the same year was 100.5 girls for every 100 boys. (Ministry of Education, 2009. p.11).

Another objective was aimed at securing access for youth and adults to appropriate learning and to preparation programs for an active life. In this direction were created the Bolivarian High Schools, the Mission Ribas and the Mission Ché Guevara. The Mission Ché Guevara, meanwhile, rescues the concept of education as a human constant, and is directed to train youth and adults in the pursuit of economic and socio-productive activities that had been excluded from formal education and hence labor market. Until 2008, this mission had trained 683,848 people (p. 6). As for secondary education, the relationship of equality between men and women, for the year 2008 was 122.8 women for every 100 men. As we see, the equality relation was slightly favorable to women. This relationship has certainly improved in recent years in favor of women.

As for higher education, now university (LOE, 2009) since 2000 not only led to the inclusion but also the internal transformation of universities. To contribute to inclusion

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and territorial expansion of university education, were initially created four new technological universities and four colleges in unattended places.

Between 2005 and 2006, the Bolivarian Government created the following institutions of higher education: The Latin American Sports University, the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM) and more than 100 university villages throughout the national territory, to comply with the objectives of Mission Sucre. In late 2006 was created the Alma Mater Mission, which entered into force in 2007, with the following objectives: 1) To promote the transformation of higher education; 2) To promote its territorial projection; and 3) To consolidate people's power, building a solidarity-based, social justice and participatory society. The Mission Alma Mater is further directed to continue the process of inclusion and territorial expansion which has led to the transformation of 25 technological university institutes and 4 university colleges in Territorial Polytechnic Universities, this transformation process is still underway with the construction of specialized universities, which are already in operation: the University of the Arts, the University Security, the University of Hydrocarbons; in addition, the University of the Workers "Jesús Rivero", the Latin American Institute of Agroecology "Paulo Freire", the Institute of Civil Aeronautics "Mayor Miguel Rodríguez". The Mission Alma Mater is definitely a big challenge for the government and the Venezuelan people.

Undoubtedly, the most notable achievement in university education has been the enrolment growth. According to a UNESCO statement, Venezuela ranks second in Latin America and fifth in the world in university enrollment (UNESCO, 2009). Figures from the Statistics Office of the Ministry of Higher Education and the OPSU (2008) indicate that: enrollment in 1990 amounted to 513,458, and by 2007 amounted to 2,135,146, in those years, enrollment in public institutions was 349,458 and 1,567,314, respectively.

In that process of inclusive education, the participation of women has been over 50%, which will contribute to the development of their intellectual, artistic potential and of any other kind as a comprehensive human being, as well as enhance their capacities for responsible participation and committed to build a participatory democracy and a socialist society.

GENDER VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

From 2007 began a new stage of attention to the issue of gender-based violence in our country, with the approval of the Law on the Right of Women to a Life Free of

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Violence, repealing the Law on violence begins against women and the family, establishing the creation of specialized agencies.

It is mid- 2013, when the national government begins the creation of institutions for comprehensive care to domestic violence against women, with the implementation process, in parallel, shelter houses and integral care units were created.

Training and development is an area of work against gender violence that has continued to grow, providing training to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), police, educational, judicial and health organizations, which have joined the actions of the government institutions; in this sense, the Central University of Venezuela (UCV), created the Master of Studies of Women in 2002, and in 2012, made a change in its curriculum to incorporate three electives on understanding and involvement of this form of violence. The Ombudsman, through its School of Human Rights has in its permanent programming courses and workshops on the rights of women to a life free of violence. The School of Magistrates also trains his officials on the subject.

The Ministry of People's Power for Women and Gender Equality as well as their bodies ascribed, not only maintains the training of its staff and of the institutions responsible for the subject, but with communities. The Ministry, in 2013, designed the National Plan for Gender Equality "**Mama Rosa**" which provides the outlines of intervention on violence against women and is articulating with Mission A Toda Vida Venezuela, mission for public security, so the gender perspective is incorporated, due to social violence that is engendered in the patriarchal violence present in the intimate and family relationships.

We can conclude that in Venezuela in these years of Bolivarian Revolution we have:

- The massive participation of women in the grassroots of society
- A Constitution that reflects the demands of women
- A rising justice system specialized in gender violence
- A rising, although full with contradictions, institutional structure specialized in women's issues.

PENDING

Given the structural feature, the magnitude and dimensions of violence against women what remains is far reaching.

In the short term it is necessary the regional and local presence of the nascent institutional structure, mass communication campaigns, to maintain ongoing training and supervision of staff involved with gender in prevention, care and research on this form of violence, the collection of national statistics and the implementation of the plan for Gender Equality; the mainstreaming of the social cabinet: health, education, work, housing in comprehensive care and prevention of violence against women through the coordinated work all these instances.

The participation of women in the People's Power

Since 2006, the main organizational units of local participatory democracy in Venezuela are the Community Councils, a continuation of the Local Public Planning Councils (CLPP) which established in 2002 (through Article 182 of the 1999 Constitution and the CLPP law in 2002). The Planning Councils experienced difficulties in their work priorities and actions at the community level, and were often co-opted by the municipal mayors. Article 184 of the Constitution established the mechanisms and jurisdiction for popular participation and self-government and local community, but the mayors and regional Governors still had the ability to intervene and control.

The Communal Council's Law of 2006 was issued to correct this error. The communal councils are authorized to administer and develop local social projects and to organize activities within their territorial jurisdiction. There are over 30,000 communal councils in Venezuela. According to official figures, in 2010 were approved and re-founded 21,050 Communal Councils (Goldfrank, 2011: 44). Each council consists of between 200 and 400 families in urban areas and is organized into different thematic committees. In rural areas from 20 families can be arranged at a Community Council and in indigenous communities a minimum of ten families.

Regarding the participation inside the Community Councils, most leaders (spokespersons) are women, which add an additional qualitative dimension from the angle of the arguments of democratization - inclusion in the establishment and development of these grassroots organizations, i.e., empowerment of actors who were initially excluded.

Women in the most vulnerable sectors have been strengthened in their political participation, beyond the Communal Councils in other social programs and state missions. It should be noted, however, that the emphasis on neighborhood struggle suggests that there is an impact on the mentality of the citizens in the perception of the possibilities of influencing policy decisions at the local level. But, in this process, women have been more persistent and consistent than men in terms of take

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responsibility and role in the socio-political organized communal labor, usually without any financial compensation.

Since 2010, Venezuela's participatory democracy has expanded, and were presented legal modifications of the decentralization system and popular participation, among others through the following new laws:

- The Organic Law of Communes
- (New) The Organic Law of the Federal Council of Government
- The Organic Law of the People's Power
- The Organic Law of Social Control
- The Organic Law of Popular and Public Planning
- The Organic Law of the Communal Economic System

The School for Strengthening of People's Power (EFPP, in Spanish) is a project created by the Ministry of People's Power for the Communes in order to strengthen the grassroots organization within the Community Councils. The EFPP is deployed in all 24 states of the country, and for 14 weeks the spokespeople belonging to the Community Councils are trained; it should be noted that within this educational project is made up mostly of women.

- Women and Food Sovereignty: vital sustenance of the people

In the area of food sovereignty it is important to emphasize the missions which universalize access to health, education and food. The Mission Mercal and Pdval have contributed greatly to claim the human right to eat healthy, good quality and cheap food. Through programs like Casa de Alimentación (Food Centers) has been benefited around 90,000 Venezuelan families and those who run these homes are precisely women.

In the last 14 years of Bolivarian Revolution, Venezuelan women have become independent even creating small and medium enterprises of social production (EPS, in Spanish), in order to ensure food security in their household and in the Venezuelan society. It is clear and important the role played by women in both aspects, their participation in food sovereignty, agricultural policies, rural development and the defense of their social, economic and political rights.

Within the state policies of the Bolivarian Revolution have been incorporated the Mission Agro Venezuela. This mission has among its functions to create home gardens,

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through beds or tables that allow the family to plant their own food as vegetables, legumes and pulses, among others.

The Venezuelan School of Food and Nutrition is an initiative of the Supreme Commander Hugo Chávez and has been strengthened by President Nicolás Maduro as a flagship project of the National Institute of Nutrition (INN, in Spanish) for the realization of the policies of the Venezuelan State in food and nutrition. Both staff giving workshops and trainings, and participants, are mostly women.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is located within the group of the 15 countries that have made exceptional progress in reducing undernourishment with the massive participation of women. It should be noted that 99.8% of Venezuelan households consume more than two meals a day, and 94.6% performed three or more meals, as well as the decline in child malnutrition in 62%.

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