



With Cap In Hand

**Towards Positive Fulfilment of the
Millennium Development Goals**

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ABOUT US

The Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA) is a regional network of feminist, individual researchers, activists and women's organizations, which define feminist politics as a matter of both consciousness and action.

CAFRA is committed to understanding the relationship between the oppression of women and other forms of oppression in the society, and to working actively for change.

Women in Development Europe (WIDE) is a trans-national network of gender specialist, women active in non-governmental organization and human rights activists. WIDE aims to articulate the relevance of the principles of gender equality and justice to the development process through research, documentation, information dissemination, capacity building, advocacy and networking.

The Caribbean Gender and Trade Network (CGTN) was set up to strengthen the capacity of Caribbean Women's Organizations for understanding the impact of Trade Liberalization on women's economic and social advancement.

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CONTEXT

In the Caribbean, one researcher has described the Millennium Development Goal as the “Most Distracting Gimmick”, an attempt to give false hope in a situation where continued threats from trade liberalisation are turning back gains of the past decade.

The Caribbean context shows

- (a) Accelerated loss of agricultural land to tourism and housing
- (b) Promotion of tourism over agriculture. The importance of agriculture to the region cannot be over-emphasized, not only in terms of its economic benefits, but also for its social, cultural and political benefits in relation to food security – having enough to eat, and food sovereignty – having control of what you eat
- (c) Moves to privatise water in many countries of the region
- (d) Increasing indebtedness – in some countries, the external debt is as high as 65% of the Gross Domestic Product
- (e) Increase in criminality and violence – gang activity is prevalent in many countries. There are reports of gang rape of girls, and more violence in schools
- (f) Increase in the presence of guns in the society
- (g) There is an increase in suicide among farmers, and even among children. Many women have migrated in search of greener pastures, leaving young children behind.
- (h) Violence against women is still rampant and trafficking in women is a growing industry

THE MILLENNIUM GOALS (MDGS)

Against this background the Millennium Goals give a hollow ring and raise questions

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger – How?
2. Achieve universal primary education – What quality?
3. Promote gender equality and empower women – Will men give up their power?
Must women take power?
4. Reduce child mortality – How?
5. Improve maternal health – By whom?
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases – For whose purpose?
7. Ensure environmental sustainability – At what cost?

Research has shown that the goals as set out are in direct contradiction to other over-riding national policies and therefore make their expected outcomes of an attainable in their present form.

GOAL 1 - ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER

For the Caribbean region, poverty has always been one major obstacle to growth and development. The issue of poverty is linked with income inequality.

The percentage share of income or consumption held by the poorest 20% of the population in the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago was 5.1%, 6.7% and 5.5% respectively. In other countries the percentage of children that suffer from malnutrition is cause for concern – Haiti 27.5%, St. Vincent and the Grenadines 27.2% and Guyana 11.8%. Millennium Development Goal 1 is quite applicable to the Caribbean.

GOAL 2 - ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION

The Caribbean has actually surpassed the rate of progress necessary to achieve the goal. However, the quality of primary education is not dealt with satisfactorily, neither are provisions for the outcome of better primary education – secondary and tertiary education places.

GOAL 3 - GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

The target for this goal is to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and to all levels of education, not later than 2015. The indicators chosen show that the Caribbean has achieved gender equality in terms of education, and in quite a few countries, the ratios actually show more girls than boys. This raises questions as to why more girls are in schools than boys, and whether there is need for Women's Desks or Men's Desks. Dr. Eudine Barriteau of the Centre for Gender and Development Studies, UWI, Cave Hill, Barbados, has commented that "For the past seven years, gender relations have been going through the most contested and hostile phase, and the vast majority of Caribbean women continue to experience, but not necessarily accept life defined by economic hardship".

This supports the views of Peggy Antrobus, another Caribbean feminist thinker. She states "While the indicators on education and literacy represent major achievements for women everywhere, the Caribbean experience shows how inadequate they are as indicators of empowerment where they have certainly not translated into higher access to employment incomes, decision-making positions in the public domain or political office".

GOAL 4 - REDUCE CHILD MORTALITY

World Bank data indicates that the region is actually on the path towards achieving the targets for this goal however, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Haiti and Suriname have not made fast enough progress. Countries need to pay closer attention to child mortality since the rate of immunisation has dropped in some cases, and there is no room for complacency.

GOAL 5 - IMPROVE MATERNAL HEALTH

The Caribbean has made good progress on reducing maternal mortality. As defined by the World Bank, the maternal mortality ratio looks at the number of deaths during pregnancy and childbirth. On average for the Caribbean in 1995 the figure was 3,100 women. Haiti remains the worst situation with 1,100 women in 1995. This is a relevant goal for the region.

GOAL 6 - COMBAT HIV/AIDS, MALARIA AND OTHER DISEASES

The region with the second highest prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS is the Caribbean. This suggests that the goal of stopping and beginning to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS is very relevant to the region. Haiti and the Dominican Republic host 85% of infected persons. In 1998, 38% of admissions to the Kingstown General Hospital was due to HIV/AIDS.

GOAL 7 - ENSURE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

The goal of ensuring environmental sustainability is particularly relevant to the Caribbean region, taking account of certain facts

- Deforestation is great in the tropics
- One half of the wood harvested in the world is for use as fuel, and this is mainly in developing countries
- Lack of formal, nationally approved forest plans

The region is prone to natural disasters, floods, hurricane, volcanoes and earthquakes. 2004 has shown the grim reality as hurricanes wrecked Grenada, Tobago and parts of Haiti, volcano in Montserrat, and earthquake in Dominica. All are due to environmental changes, particularly deforestation.

GOAL 8 - DEVELOP A GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR DEVELOPMENT

For this goal, the indicators and targets are of utmost importance to countries in the region. These indicators, especially those dealing with aid and trade, are important to the region's efforts to reducing our devastating debt burden, improving the level of technology and foster a truly global partnership for development. Over the years there has been a considerable amount of aid flowing to developing countries from countries within the Development Assistance Committee (DAC). For the indicators of this goal, it is worth nothing that net ODA as a percentage of DAC donors' GNI is targeted at 0.7% in total and 0.15% for LDCs.

Too much of our aid is spent on consumption purposes and not enough on investment ventures. Even though the spending of aid and other financial assistance may be the responsibility of individual governments, a regional agreement on the spending of these funds may be drafted. This agreement would ensure that all Caribbean countries are involved in the spending of funds. This target may be difficult to be achieved as some, if not all the governments may view this as a loss of sovereignty.

THE BURDEN OF POVERTY

The thread linking all these goals is the burden of poverty. Poverty eradication is central to women's empowerment and women's empowerment is central to reducing child mortality, the spread of HIV/AIDS and improving maternal health.

Women's sexual and reproductive health has not been defined as either a goal or target. Women's lack of power over their own bodies translates into an inability to negotiate safe sex, to insist that their partners use condoms, or in some cases, permission to use female contraceptives. Add to this the fact that there is still a great deal of sex role stereotyping in the school curriculum that limits the options for girls. The task requires a great deal of education, public awareness, and creativity. The task needs resources.

The main players and holders of the resources are in the developed world. As long as they continue to build capitalism through the trade process in its current form, poverty will increase. Not only is the Caribbean a dumping ground for excessive production, it is at the same time classified as a middle income region with no need for developmental grants. Aid in the form of loans with high interest repayment plans create and maintain poverty.

Goal 8 then becomes a farce if the raising of resources is dependent on rich countries only. The development of a global partnership for development is ultimately a partnership between unequals. The inherent problem of an imbalance of power puts a shadow on the concept itself and whether or not such a partnership can be achieved is questionable.

WITH CAP IN HAND

We the people must shape the goals and targets to meet our needs. We must knock on the doors of the policy makers with Cap in Hand, not empty and begging to be filled, but bearing the gifts of our research, knowledge, skills and expertise inviting partnerships for sustainable development

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