

LEARNING FROM INNOVATION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN:

INNOVATION, ON THE BASIS OF GENDER: CATALYZING GENDER EQUALITY

Learning from Innovation in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is a thematic knowledge brief series developed by the UNDP Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean. It seeks to advance our understanding of key structural development challenges in LAC, by capturing emerging lessons learned from innovative approaches to tackle these issues in countries across the region.

WHAT INNOVATION CAN DO FOR WOMEN

Innovative methodologies and technologies present an opportunity to catalyze efforts to identify, understand and address the multiple facets of gender inequality through more systemic and transformational gender-sensitive approaches. UNDP teams around the region are leveraging the potential of innovation to foster gender equality around 4 major lines of action established in its [Regional Gender Equality Strategy](#) for LAC, as presented in Box 1.

LAC THROUGH A GENDER LENS

Latin America and the Caribbean has made significant strides towards advancing gender equality. It stands out as the region with the most consolidated institutional framework for gender equality, 70 percent of the mechanisms for the advancement of women being a Ministry or an entity with ministerial level leadership.¹ Additionally, 64 percent of the countries in LAC have reached near-equal levels of women's participation in public administration — a figure that surpasses any other region globally.

However, the region struggles with persistent challenges, including insufficient budgetary allocations for gender equality initiatives.² In 2022, women in Latin America earned labour income equivalent to 82.6 percent of that earned by

BOX 1. UNDP's Strategic Priorities for Gender Equality in LAC



Promote inclusive economies and women's economic empowerment



Contributing to the creation of more inclusive and egalitarian societies



Promoting a nature-based, gender transformative and risk-informed development



Fostering democratic governance with women's participation and leadership

Source: UNDP (2023)

men, and labor market participation for women of working age stood at just 51.7 percent, compared to 74.5 percent for men. Moreover, women in LAC countries are 17 percent more likely than to have vulnerable jobs and 20 percent less likely to own a bank account.

¹ ECLAC's Gender Observatory, 2024.

² Source: BID (2022). Institutionalisation of women's ministries: coordinating efforts to increase impact

Furthermore, the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work falls heavily on women, who account for three-quarters of this essential yet unrecognized labor. All this, coupled with statistics of femicides in the region, where no fewer than 4,450 women fell victim in 2022, underscores the urgent need for different approaches to address gender issues and serves as a stark reminder of the work that lies ahead.³

READY FOR AN UPGRADE? NEW APPROACHES TO ENABLE THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN LAC

UNDP is implementing transformative approaches to address gender inequalities through the work of its [Accelerator Labs](#), [Infosegura](#) initiative, the [Spotlight Initiative](#), and the [Regional Gender Team](#). This synergy of efforts presents a fresh perspective on catalyzing change, experimenting with innovative methodologies to foster behavioral shifts, and harnessing digital technologies to enhance the identification and support mechanisms for women in vulnerable conditions. Table 1 provides brief descriptions of some of the initiatives being implemented at the regional or country level.

TABLE 1. Selected UNDP innovation initiatives fostering gender equality in LAC

Barbados



The [Docufilm: The Barbadian Matriarchy of Fishing](#) skillfully employs creative storytelling to dispel misconceptions surrounding women in the fish harvesting industry. Through a captivating narrative, it sheds light on the invaluable contributions these women make to the sector, bridging the gap between tradition and innovation, preserving and transmitting ancestral wisdom and digital expertise, emerging as champions of the industry, environment, and sustainability.

Brazil



UNDP collaborated with the National Council of Justice of Brazil to develop an **artificial intelligence tool for analyzing cases of women’s homicides through a gender perspective** to improve our understanding of the underlying causes and distinct patterns of gender-based violence. By doing so, this initiative aimed to strengthen the justice system’s response by informing and shaping effective policies and actionable strategies to prevent and address these crimes in the region.

Through its Innovation Modality, the **Floresta+ Amazon** project fosters inventive approaches for conservation and preservation of forest by compensating individuals for environmental services in the Legal Amazon. While half of the supported businesses were spearheaded by women, 67 percent of those chosen for the acceleration process were led by female entrepreneurs, reinforcing the drive toward a more inclusive and diverse business landscape with innovations aimed at the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of native vegetation are strengthened and promoted.

Bolivia



A chatbot was developed to capture the professional profiles of Bolivian women -including education, experience and soft skills- with the goal of using this information in a matching marketplace to support their job search.

2 ECLAC’s Gender Observatory 2022.

Ecuador



The “**Brave Schools**” initiative was designed to foster changes in the behavior of both faculty and students concerning gender-based violence, gender roles and stereotypes. The methodology incorporates Successful Educational Actions (SEAs) such as dialogic gatherings and the dialogic model of conflict resolution to promote equal dialogue among all members of the educational community, ensuring that every individual had the opportunity to participate regardless of hierarchical position, acknowledging everyone’s ability to act and reflect.

Peru



As part of a project that aimed to conserve agrobiodiversity and improve local water management, **female community leaders were trained to monitor water resources using the Global Water Watch technique** and a portable testing kit specifically designed for non-specialized volunteers who can read and write. They were also trained to assess and analyze test results, to then use them to propose conservation and protection measures.

The digital and financial inclusion program “**Innovate your Market**” is empowering female entrepreneurs from traditional markets around the country through a learning journey of personal and commercial growth, where they are also challenged with co-creating solutions to improve working conditions, governance and leadership in their markets.

Uruguay



UNDP developed a **monitor to track digital violence against women**, specifically public figures such as politicians, journalists, communicators, activists and artists on Twitter. The monitor provides real-time evidence regarding the level of aggressions and analysis of the quantity and type, as well as the most frequently used insults. This was a result of a collaboration with the National Institute of Women of Uruguay and the British Embassy.

UNDP REGIONAL INITIATIVES:

- The **Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) with a focus on women in LAC**, is a gender-sensitive version of the MPI which provides data that allows for a more in-depth analysis of women’s poverty and its specificities, the targeting of actions by social protection systems, and the generation of public policy recommendations.
- UNDP’s **Care Georeferencing tool** systematizes and generates updated, real-time information about the care supply within a city or area; studies the territorial distribution of the population that may need care and analyzes whether the care supply is sufficient when compared to the care demands of the population in that territory. It combines traditional data sources such as administrative records, census data, and surveys; with innovative data sources including web scrapping, big data and crowd mapping, providing valuable insights in scenarios where data is scarce.

- **SARA** is a digital assistant that provides guidance for women, adolescents and girls who might be at risk of violence. SARA is available 24 hours a day to help users assess their situation and make use of institutional or civil society support services available in their country. In addition, it offers legal advice and helps to create an emergency plan, as well as emergency numbers and contacts for victims. The tool was developed using artificial intelligence and machine learning. It receives ongoing training from specialists to ensure information and guidance are tailored to each location's specific context, form, and language.

EMERGING LESSONS:



1 | A DIGITAL BOOST: Digital innovations can help us reach more women and accelerate the development of safe and supportive environments needed for their economic empowerment

Technology can significantly contribute to women's economic empowerment by supporting their professional development and enabling them to leverage the opportunities that the digital economy presents. This is clear in the initiatives from Bolivia and Peru, in which technology was used as a mean to facilitate women's participation in the economy.

However, these efforts will not be effective without safe and supportive ecosystems for women. Innovations such as the Care Georeferencing Tool help create environments that enable women to access their full potential by assisting in the assessment of the care system in specific territories. Decision makers can visualize the data in different ways to gain a better understanding of the gaps between the demand and supply of care services in specific territories.

Digital tools can also be used to strengthen institutional capacities to support and protect women. Through SARA, more women have access to a safe, anonymous, and confidential first contact to use if they feel at risk of violence at any time.



2 | A CALL FOR DISRUPTION: Innovative methods have the potential to challenge the status quo and foster the behavior change required to achieve gender equal societies

Innovative strategies can be used to reshape the discourse around gender and its intertwined societal roles, disrupting entrenched power dynamics. For example, an evaluation of the "Brave Schools" methodology conducted through a randomized controlled trial revealed a significant shift in perception among adolescents, moving from normalizing violence to challenging and redefining gender norms in their school lives.

In Barbados, showing the docufilm to groups of students resulted in many girls expressing a new interest in the fishing industry as a career opportunity. Many asked to be paired up with women starring in the film to gain firsthand experience of what it's like to be a fisherwoman for a day.



3 | FOR HER, FOR ALL: Leveraging innovation in the hands of women to foster resilient communities

Both initiatives showcased from Perú exemplify the far-reaching impact of innovation when women are at the forefront as primary users. By having access to new techniques that strengthen their capacities in water management, women were empowered to participate in decision-making spaces, where their advocacy efforts resulted in getting the



approval of three public investment projects for the conservation of water resources and developing a community plan for monitoring water quality, led by women from different communities.

In addition to enhancing their businesses, women who were part of the 'Innovate your Market' program significantly strengthened their abilities to serve as innovation leaders within their communities.

In Brazil, the Floresta+ Amazon project underscores how women are driving the development of the environmental services market in the Amazon region, which not only bolsters ecological conservation efforts but can also catalyze economic growth and social well-being within their communities.



4 | HIDDEN FIGURES NO MORE: Innovative methods have the potential to embed a gender lens in data generation

Harnessing technology and innovative data collection methods can help us address gender inequality more effectively by producing gender-sensitive data. This would enable us to have better information to identify where are the women we need to reach and understand their experiences and needs, so we can create evidence-based policies and targeted interventions that address those issues more efficiently. For instance, the Care Georeferencing tool can provide innovative analysis of data, constructing new methodological categories such as “care deserts”— that is, areas with high demand for care but low accessibility levels.

For example, analyzing data from the MPI focused on women allows us to identify the systemic and structural obstacles that prevent them from escaping poverty and formulate gender-transformative policy recommendations. The cases of Brazil and Uruguay serve to illustrate how technology can contribute to generating gender-sensitive data by programming

digital tools to analyze already available information with a gender lens, and how this kind of data can be used to formulate better responses to the different challenges faced by women.

SUMMING UP

There has been significant progress in the region when it comes to promoting gender equality, with many countries having developed strategies and policies. However, the expected results will not arrive at the pace we need them for this generation of women to experience living on an equal society. Innovation -be it methodological or technological- can increase the efficiency and impact of these efforts.

UNDP's Regional Strategy for Gender Equality highlights the importance of incorporating a systemic approach that promotes an understanding of the interconnections between different development challenges and their impacts on women. This calls for new gender-sensitive approaches to address key structural issues such as the unjust social organization of care and discriminatory social norms, as well as adopting intersectional strategies that respond to their specific needs and create more sustainable, inclusive and egalitarian societies.

Leveraging the potential of innovative methodologies and technologies will catalyze efforts toward achieving gender equality by enhancing data collection and analysis to understand the needs of women, improve the offer and its efficiency, as well as increase its reach to support, protect and empower more women. Furthermore, its disruptive component could serve to foster behavior change required to put an end to power dynamics.

