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ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN ADVANCING WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND THE COMMITMENT OF THE OAS

CONCEPT NOTE AND PRELIMINARY AGENDA FOR THE 50TH REGULAR SESSION OF THE OAS GENERAL ASSEMBLY (Draft)

1. Introduction

The Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) prioritized the incorporation of the gender perspective as a fundamental element to achieve gender equality commitments, including those of the Declaration and the Platform for Action.¹ Twenty years ago in the Americas, OAS Member States adopted the Inter-American Program on the Promotion of Women's Human Rights and Gender Equity and Equality (IAP),² in order to: i) systematically integrate the gender perspective into all the organs, agencies, and entities of the inter-American system, and ii) encourage OAS member states to formulate public policies, strategies, and proposals aimed at promoting women's human rights and gender equality in all spheres of life.

During the 38th Assembly of Delegates of the CIM, held in May 2019 in the Dominican Republic, the member states requested that the CIM Secretariat present "... a proposal for discussion of the specific theme of achievements and challenges in the exercise of women's rights and the commitment of the OAS to this agenda for inclusion in the framework of the OAS General Assembly in 2020, 20 years after the adoption of the IAP"³ This concept note responds to that request.

Since the adoption of the Declaration of Santo Domingo, the world has confronted the beginning of an unprecedented global crisis. COVID-19 causes specific and differentiated impacts in the lives of women, it is deepening existing gender inequalities, both inside and outside the household, and has generated an imminent risk of setbacks in the rights already achieved.

In the framework of the 20th anniversary of the IAP, which joins other processes such as the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action and the 25th anniversary of the Belém do Pará Convention, the CIM has

1. UN (1995). Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/intergovernmental-support/world-conferences-on-women>

2. OAS (2000). Inter-American Program on the Promotion of Women's Human Rights and Gender Equity and Equality, [http://www.oas.org/en/CIM/docs/PIA\[EN\].pdf](http://www.oas.org/en/CIM/docs/PIA[EN].pdf)

3. CIM (2019). Declaration of Santo Domingo on Equality and Autonomy in the Exercise of Women's Political Rights for Strengthening Democracy, <http://www.oas.org/en/cim/docs/DeclaracionSANTODOMINGO-EN.pdf>

worked to:

- a. Make visible the progress made within the OAS General Secretariat (GS/OAS), as well as the persistent challenges to effective gender mainstreaming;
- b. Account for the substantive progress made by Member States and thus strengthen the commitment to gender equality on the OAS agenda; and
- c. Situate the implementation of the IAP in the context of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, identify the new patterns that become, for the CIM, lines of work, and above all, mobilize concrete and effective action to avoid any setback in the rights achieved by women as a result of the economic, political and social crisis.

2. Current situation

a. *Of the OAS General Secretariat*

The implementation of the IAP has achieved greater visibility of gender equality within the work of the OAS, including the strengthening of CIM technical assistance to other areas of the Organization, and the deepening of the work of all parts of the OAS to promote the participation of women and eliminate discrimination and violence against them.

The main achievements in recent years have been the adoption of the Institutional Policy on Gender Equality, Diversity and Human Rights of the General Secretariat (2016) and the *Action Plan for its Implementation* (2017).⁴ In the implementation of this Policy, the CIM has strengthened its offer of training to GS/OAS personnel to include four introductory and specialized courses on the integration of the gender perspective in the work of the Organization. It has also developed specific tools such as the Guide to Inclusive Communication and has proposed at least 20 specific recommendations aimed at the OAS regulations on human resources and institutional culture.⁵

b. *Of Member States*

One of the great challenges currently facing public institutions to close gender gaps is the effective and sustained mainstreaming of the gender perspective in all areas of public administration. This includes integrating this approach in the policies, strategies, programs, administrative and economic activities, and in the institutional culture of the public sector, to effectively contribute to a real change in the situation of gender inequality.

Since the adoption of the IAP, the CIM has supported a multiplicity of initiatives to institutionalize the gender, diversity and rights approach in the public sectors of OAS Member States, including the strengthening of political commitments, their transformation into effective policies and practices at the institutional level, and building the capacity of public officials. These initiatives include the IAP Follow-up Programs (SEPIA),⁶ which between 2001 and 2004, under the coordination of the CIM and together with other relevant areas of the OAS, placed gender and rights issues on the work agendas of the committees and ministerial meetings of the region

The evaluations of the implementation of the IAP⁷ record both enormous progress and important areas

4. CIM (2017). Gender, Diversity and Rights at the General Secretariat of the OAS, <http://www.oas.org/en/CIM/docs/GPAP-EN.pdf>

5. For more information on the implementation of the Gender Policy and its Action Plan, see the CIM Annual Reports at:

<http://www.oas.org/en/cim/reports.asp>

6. SEPIA Programs were implemented in the areas of Labor, Justice, Education and Science and Technology,

<http://www.oas.org/en/cim/sepia.asp>

7. For more information, see:

- The National Reports on the Implementation of the IAP, prepared by the States in preparation for the Assemblies of Delegates of the CIM, <http://www.oas.org/en/cim/nationalreports.asp>

where a renewal of commitments and efforts are required to strengthen progress towards equality in the line of OAS areas of work that have been identified as priorities by member states.

At the end of 2019, the CIM circulated to its Delegates a “Questionnaire on strengthening mechanisms for the advancement of women's rights.”⁸ The questionnaire sought to identify the main opportunities and challenges faced by National Machineries in the effective operationalization of their role as directors of the national equality/gender policy, as well as the role of the CIM in supporting that work through its technical assistance.

Coincidentally, the Delegates highlighted as opportunities:

- Greater sensitivity and high-level political will towards gender equality and its expression in normative instruments such as policies and action plans;
- The gradual strengthening of the National Machineries in terms of their capacity to provide technical assistance and work in an inter-sectoral manner;
- Increasingly coordinated work with civil society and in particular the women's movement;
- Existing training and tools from international cooperation and continuity in terms of their specialization; and
- Greater social openness (with some exceptions) to gender equality and greater sensitivity to the benefits of equality.

As challenges, the Delegates highlighted:

- The need for legislative and regulatory reforms to support full equality and remove structural barriers;
- The lack of allocation of human, financial and technical resources for their work and the invisibility of the real cost of this work;
- The ability to work in a specialized inter-sectoral way and provide the tools needed by all sectors; and
- The persistence of traditional gender norms and practices that conflict with the principles of equality, as well as the growth of the movement against gender equality and the social changes it represents.

In terms of the CIM's role in supporting the strengthening of the National Machineries, the Delegates highlighted:

- Generation of knowledge on gender and human rights that translates theory into practice, as well as the exchange of good practices from States;
- The creation of spaces for the exchange of experiences and lessons learned;
- The provision of technical assistance (training) in institutional strengthening, including topics such as planning, budgets, and inter-sectoral coordination;
- Closer work with the international sections (directorates, units, etc.) of the National Machineries, in triangulation with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs;
- Specific technical support to strengthen the response to gender-based violence;
- Creation of spaces at the regional level for dialogue and exchange with civil society organizations.

c. COVID-19 in Women's Lives

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis in March 2020, the CIM has analyzed and highlighted the gender dimensions of the pandemic with a view to encouraging governments and other actors to take into account the unique realities of women and girls in the formulation and implementation of more effective

- The Acts of the CIM Assemblies of Delegates, which provide a summary of the “Exchange of good practices on the thematic axis of the Assembly”, <http://www.oas.org/en/cim/assembly.asp>

8. Note CIM-12-125-19

public policies. For this, the CIM has generated knowledge and spaces for exchange and training, opinion articles and other tools, including:

- COVID-19 in Women's Lives: Reasons to Recognize the Differential Impacts;⁹
- Repository: COVID-19 in women's lives¹⁰
- Violence against Women and the Measures to Contain the Spread of COVID-19¹¹
- Position Paper: Rural women, Agriculture and Sustainable Development in the Americas in the Context of COVID-19¹²
- COVID-19 in women's lives: The global care emergency¹³

3. Proposals for the Future

The CIM's proposal to strengthen the implementation of the IAP is organized into three aspects:

- a. Identify priority areas within the GS/OAS to concentrate the technical assistance and collaborative work of the CIM;
- b. Reframe and reinforce the technical assistance of the CIM to the States based on assessments and dialogue with the National Machineries; and
- c. Generate high-level political dialogue and commitments to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic from a gender and women's human rights perspective.

a. For the OAS General Secretariat

The CIM proposes a process of analyzing progress, identifying good practices, formulating concrete recommendations and policy dialogue on the way forward to fill some of the persistent gaps in the effective implementation of the IAP in the following key areas: parity, care, information and communication technologies, and the migration of women, which have become fundamental accelerators for achieving gender equality. In the same way, the cultural patterns and gender stereotypes that underlie all inequalities continue to exist and, in many cases, have led to movements of resistance to gender equality and internationally agreed goals.

This analysis and exchange process will be carried out through new SEPIA Programs in the aforementioned areas, seeking to place gender equality at the center of the work agendas of the relevant inter-American ministerial processes and generating specialized technical knowledge and training to support action. For this process, the CIM has prepared a project document and is identifying possible partners for the mobilization of specific funds.

b. For the Member States

On the basis of its experience with the implementation of Participatory Gender Assessments (PGAs)¹⁴ with some of the National Machineries for the Advancement of Women in the region, as well as the great demand for technical assistance received by the CIM from these Machineries, and the results of the 2019

9. CIM (2020). COVID-19 in Women's Lives: Reasons to Recognize the Differential Impacts,

<http://www.oas.org/en/cim/docs/ArgumentarioCOVID19-EN.pdf>

10. The Repository is available on the CIM website: <http://www.oas.org/en/CIM/COVID-19.asp>

11. CIM/MESECVI (2020). Violence against Women and the Measures to Contain the Spread of COVID-19,

<http://www.oas.org/en/cim/docs/COVID-19-RespuestasViolencia-EN.pdf>

12. CIM (2020). Position Paper: Rural women, Agriculture and Sustainable Development in the Americas in the Context of COVID-19,

<http://www.oas.org/en/cim/docs/DocumentoPosicion-MujeresRurales-FINAL-EN.pdf>

13. CIM (2020). COVID-19 in women's lives: The global care emergency, <http://www.oas.org/en/cim/docs/CuidadosCOVID19-EN.pdf>

14. Between 2015 and 2020, the CIM has received funds from the Government of Liechtenstein to implement the methodological transfer for the PGAs to the National Machineries of Paraguay (2015), Costa Rica (2017, at the municipal level) and the Dominican Republic (2018, and 2019 at the inter-institutional level), see: <http://www.oas.org/es/cim/docs/Manual-DiagnosticoParticipativoGenero-ES.pdf>

questionnaire, in June 2020 the CIM initiated a dialogue at both the technical and political levels with representatives of selected Machineries, in order to identify their main advances, challenges and needs.

This exchange has generated important bases for the CIM to review and relaunch its offer of technical assistance in this area, seeking in particular to strengthen:

1. Support in terms of “advocacy” for mainstreaming to convince all people who work in public administration of the importance of mainstreaming;
2. Support for planning and budgeting in order to carry out mainstreaming effectively and sustainably;
3. Support for the “specialization” of mainstreaming to deepen work by themes/sectors with training that goes beyond the basic concepts of gender and women's human rights.

c. For COVID-19 in Women's Lives

The 50th regular session of the OAS General Assembly will be held in Washington, DC on October 20th and 21st 2020, with the theme “Confronting the challenges of COVID-19 in the hemisphere: A collaborative approach to address vulnerabilities and build resilience in times of crisis, based on the four pillars of the OAS.”¹⁵

In this context, the CIM proposes that the President of the CIM, on behalf of the Executive Committee, request a space on the regular agenda of the OAS General Assembly, for a panel on ***COVID-19 in Women's Lives: Future challenges and priorities***, with a view to highlighting the gender dimensions of the pandemic and submitting to the Assembly a set of practical public policy recommendations to mitigate the impact of the crisis.

DRAFT AGENDA¹⁶

- 11:00 Introduction: COVID-19 in Women's Lives and Protection of the IAP
- Alejandra Mora Mora, Executive Secretary of the CIM
- 11:20 Panel: Reflections from CIM partners on the implementation of the IAP in the context of COVID-19
- President of the CIM (Minister for Women of the Dominican Republic/TBD)
 - Tatiana Rein, President of the Committee of Experts of the MESECVI
 - Gerardo de Icaza, Director of the Department of Electoral Cooperation and Observation, OAS
 - Representative of civil society/TBD

15. According to Resolution [CP/RES. 1157/20](#) “Date of the Fiftieth Period of Regular Sessions of the General Assembly” of the OAS Permanent Council, approved in the virtual regular session held on July 22, 2020, http://scm.oas.org/doc_public/english/hist_20/cp42689e03.docx

16. The times indicated are by way of example, the panel can be held at the time indicated by the Preparatory Commission