PLAN OF ACTION OF THE CIM ON WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POWER AND DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURES

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PRESENTATION

The Twenty-eighth Assembly of Delegates adopted CIM/RES. 189 (XXVIII-O/96), convening the Inter-American Meeting of Consultation to discuss "Women's Participation in Power and Decision-making Structures," with particular emphasis on implementing measures that encourage governments to develop work plans. The Meeting of Consultation took place from February 17 to 19, 1998, and was the high point in the celebrations of the CIM's 70th anniversary. The Permanent Secretariat presented a working document, written by Dr. Evangelina García Prince. During the meeting, some delegates asked her to include additional data, which they promised to provide. The revised working document, with the requested additions, was published for presentation at this Assembly of Delegates as document CIM/doc.39/98 add. 1.

The event was divided into two parts, with the first days devoted to subregional groups and the rest to the region as a whole.

The Permanent Secretariat of the CIM submitted to the XXIX Assembly of Delegates for its consideration the Final Report of the Inter-American Meeting of Consultation, which contained the Plan of Action proposed by the participants. It consists of: (1) diagnoses for each of the four subregions: the Caribbean; the Andean region; Central America, Mexico, Panama, and the Dominican Republic; and the Southern Cone; (2) a general diagnosis for the Hemisphere; and (3) priority lines of action.

The Assembly of Delegates adopted the proposed Plan which was approved in November, 1998, by resolution CIM/RES. 198 (XXIX-O/98).

PLAN OF ACTION

1. Subregional Diagnoses

The Caribbean

On the eve of the 21st century, women in the Caribbean are still unable to make a significant impact in most areas where political and economic influence matters. They are still struggling to break traditional barriers in the political, economic, and business life of their countries.

Presently, in many areas of the Caribbean women make up the largest percentage of the workforce in a number of sectors, such as the garment, hotel, and restaurant industries, education, and health and social work, among others. Nevertheless, this does not mean they have greater access to managerial positions. The number of women occupying senior-level positions in the executive branch of government, for example, is still quite limited. On the other hand, the number of female elected officials in the parliaments and assemblies has steadily increased in recent years.

Educating government officials and the population at large about women's issues is of the utmost importance. The lack of basic support systems for working parents, such as day-care and after-school-care programs, parental leave, and flexible work schedules, is a strong hindrance to women's career advancement. Appallingly, in many places women are forced to leave work every day to pick up their children and then have no choice but to bring them to the workplace until the end of the work day.

The delegates agreed to furnish additional statistical information within two weeks. A consensus was reached that, in order to be consistent, such statistics would be comprised of the information listed below, with the cutoff date being 1997:
Women Ministers (Appointed and elected captioned separately)
Women in Parliament (Senate and house parliamentary and secretaries (MPs))
Women in the Judiciary (High court judges)
Women in administrative branches of government (Permanent secretaries)
Women in local government (Mayors)

Andean Region

In each country of the Andean subregion, the constitution enshrines equality and guarantees its exercise, and there is a growing effort to establish legal instruments that extend this principle to other general and specialized legislation. In practice this constitutional principle is not strictly applied.

Regarding political participation, there is a trend toward greater mobilization of the female population in key political processes. Nonetheless, even when women make up one half of the electorate, their representation in government and in public office is under 20%. In recent years, there has been no increase in participation in the legislative branch, and promotion in the executive branch is relatively slow.

In the judiciary, the number of female judges has increased, but only very recently have some women sat on the supreme courts of justice.

Despite the difficulties and hurdles still facing women, there is growing social and institutional awareness of the inequity of these situations and the need to overcome them.

All the countries have national bodies responsible for public policy on women, and there is a trend toward strengthening these bodies.

There are a few initiatives in some countries to adopt gender criteria in public policies. All those countries have institutionalized programs to introduce equality criteria in their educational systems and to fight violence against women, among other initiatives.

Not enough progress has been made toward institutionalizing public policy on the communications media as a way to support pro-equality initiatives.

Leadership training activities for women have been conducted in all the countries of the region. But they are not systematic and have not been institutionalized, even though their necessity is recognized. A significant portion of the training has been aimed at women leaders at the municipal and local levels.

In the make-up of political parties there is a high proportion of women; in some instances they are one half of the rank and file. But there are still very few women in party management, even in countries where some political parties have set quotas for women at the management level.

The situation is similar in unions and labor confederations. Even in instances where women members are in the majority, female management is minimal.

In the countries of this region, the last decade has not seen a significant increase of women in legislative posts, although in some countries they have a significant presence in departmental and/or municipal governments.

There is limited research in the region on the electoral behavior of women, and a notable lack of election statistics broken down by gender with which to gear public policy toward better and greater female participation.

Central America, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Panama

Women in Central America, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Panama have made a significant effort to attain the full exercise of their rights. Therefore, the role of women at the various levels of politics and decision-making is beginning to take on momentum. In fact, in this subregion women are entering the ministries and vice ministries, in areas that were previously the exclusive domain of men, such as finance and foreign affairs. It is important to note that one female president and several female vice presidents have been elected in the subregion.

Nonetheless, the enormous efforts and political and social presence of women in the subregion have not guaranteed them equal access to positions of power and decision-making in the political realm. This is seen in their still limited access to elective office, to political party power structures, and to national decision-making positions, where their promotion is also impeded. In particular, it is extremely difficult for women to participate in the legislature of almost any country in the subregion. Women's ability to influence important changes for the benefit of women is limited by the absence of a critical mass in parliament committed to this goal.

The Southern Cone

Over the past decade, the governments of the Southern Cone countries have demonstrated the political will to deal with the issue of women's participation. A variety of measures and mechanisms have been implemented, resulting in important progress in women's level of participation in politics and their occupation of certain positions of power. Still, it is important to note that these positions are primarily linked to technical-political positions to which they were appointed and which, in most cases, involve social issues. This has not occurred at the level of offices attained through popular elections, where the percentage of female candidates and women elected remains insufficient.

This can be explained to a great extent by the fact that, despite legislative progress in our countries relating to the rights and legal equality of all citizens, the equality accorded women in the constitution and the laws has not been sufficient to change traditions and cultural patterns that hinder women's participation in certain arenas. Therefore, the main problems in terms of women's participation in power and decision-making structures stem not only from how the law addresses their rights, but also from their practical opportunities for exercising those rights.

Finally, there is a consensus that, even with the specific data our countries have on women's access to offices at the parliamentary and ministerial levels, it is still difficult to make a more precise diagnosis on positions of power at the intermediate level. Another impediment to be considered is the deficient entry and processing of statistical data on political participation, which, in many countries, are not broken down by gender.

2. Overall Hemispheric Diagnosis

From the known diagnoses that are common to all regions of the Hemisphere, it can be concluded that:

1. Women have shown considerable leadership ability in public office, nongovernmental organizations, and community organizations.
2. Equal opportunity and the gender perspective play an important part in the national agenda, which recognizes that the attainment of power by women results in greater well-being for humanity.
3. In the majority of countries, there is a widespread trend toward more democratic citizen participation in public life and public office, although women are underrepresented at almost all levels of government.
4. Although women make up one half of the electorate, the proportion of female candidates for public office and, consequently, the number of women elected is quite low. The traditional practice in many political parties and government structures of favoring male leadership continue to impede women's participation in public affairs.
5. Government institutions and private enterprise in general do not take full advantage of women's aptitude for high-level management and policy-making; the invaluable contributions they could make to development and democracy are underutilized.
6. Female representation in political party management is very low considering their average level of female membership.
7. Women's representation in union management does not correlate to their level of membership in the unions themselves.
8. Over and covert discrimination mechanisms persist in social and political institutions. They can be seen in the ways opportunities are announced and individuals are selected and promoted.

9. Women's unequal level of participation in economic life and obstacles derived from their education prevent them from taking their rightful place in society.
10. National mechanisms take a number of forms and vary in effectiveness. They are often limited by a lack of clear mandates and a scarcity of resources.
11. It is necessary to strengthen, and to establish where they do not exist, means of cooperation among national women's organizations, state mass media agencies, and neighborhood and community radio and television networks to conduct ongoing pro-equality campaigns, raise awareness, and devise multifaceted strategies aimed at different sectors.
12. National and regional statistical institutions still lack the necessary capacity to address issues relating to equal treatment for women and men in political, economic, and social fora.
13. It is necessary to promote and guarantee access and equitable participation for women and men in all public and private power structures as an intrinsic aspect of their rights as citizens and as a means of ensuring their participation in developing equal conditions.
14. Women must receive broad and comprehensive training for decision-making positions. The initiatives pursued in the region in this area are still insufficient.

3. Areas for Priority Action

I. Cultural Change

The action steps proposed in this section are aimed essentially at achieving a transformation in the political culture of society and in the cultural patterns that shape family life. The fundamental aim is to use the educational system and the communications media to promote the principles of gender equity and equal opportunity, and to make women in all walks of life aware of their potential for leadership.

a. Acting through national women's organizations, negotiate agreements and understandings with education ministries for an effective program to promote the principles of gender equity and equal opportunity at all levels of the national education systems, through:
   - Revision of school textbooks;
   - Introduction of curriculum content dealing with education for equal opportunity and gender equity;
   - Refresher courses and awareness training for teachers on the principles of equal opportunity and gender equity.

b. Acting through national women's organizations, negotiate cooperation agreements with the public and private communications media (radio, press, and television) to enlist their cooperation in promoting society's awareness of the principles that underlie equal opportunity and gender equity, and in portraying attitudes of respect and tolerance among men and women, through:
   - Public awareness campaigns about the importance of women's participation in building democracy in our countries, and stressing the need to establish shared family responsibilities to facilitate such participation;
   - Campaigns to eradicate gender-specific references in the media;
   - Information campaigns about the rights of women.

c. Acting through national women's organizations, encourage the conduct of studies to identify and analyze hidden or informal barriers encountered by women leaders as they seek to participate and to occupy and retain positions of power.

II. Training

The state and civil society must assume shared responsibility for comprehensive leadership training. The CIM will play a key role in promoting activities of this kind, supplying relevant data and encouraging horizontal cooperation in the exchange of information on successful experiences.

a. Working in coordination with national women's organizations, promote comprehensive leadership training programs for women in member countries, with an emphasis on building political negotiation skills.
b. Promote leadership programs in the schools, within a co-educational context, so that girls may develop their self-esteem and become aware of their potential opportunities.
c. The CIM will need to identify sources of funding and to find ways of obtaining and distributing resources to member countries, in particular as regards programs for the eradication of poverty, the organization of leadership, and the promotion of equal opportunity for women and men.

III. Modernization of Institutions

The action steps under this section involve, essentially, promoting legal reform, leadership training for women within government organizations, and encouraging equal opportunity and gender equity in promotions in the public and private sectors.

a. Promote equal opportunity in the guidelines and procedures for qualification and promotion in the civil service, and foster similar principles in the various public agencies and institutions.
b. Promote leadership training for women in the middle management ranks of the executive branch of government, strengthening their upward mobility toward decision-making levels.
c. Orient management training structures within government toward supporting the principles of gender equity and equal opportunity for men and women.
d. Urge governments and employers to offer support systems and working arrangements that make it easier for women to find and keep positions in business and politics, such as day care, flexible work schedules, or shared workdays.
e. Promote and support initiatives that foster gender equity and equal opportunity in the occupation of decision-making positions within political parties, labor unions, trade organizations, institutions, private corporations, academic bodies, and other civil society organizations.
f. Promote the modernization of existing law to enshrine the principles of gender equity and equal opportunity at the decision-making level, and to ensure that mechanisms for enforcing those laws exist.
g. Promote the reform of electoral laws and the statutes of political parties to include mechanisms that guarantee equal participation by men and women.
h. Promote legislation mandating proportional representation in offices awarded by popular vote, in countries where such laws do not exist, and support the stiffening and enforcement of election laws or regulations that stipulate proportional quotas for women running for such offices.
i. Abolish gender-specific references or allusions from the laws.
j. Encourage OAS member governments to consider proposing proportionate numbers of women among their candidates for OAS elective offices.

k. Establish, update, or adapt systems of indicators for measuring women's participation in power and decision-making structures, as well as in social, academic, and political spheres, to ensure that the information compiled reflects the progress achieved in each country.
l. Establish ways of gathering and processing electoral statistics broken down by gender.
m. Establish ways of improving statistical information on women's participation in political parties, in both qualitative and quantitative terms.
n. Break down national statistics by gender, and strengthen libraries and documentation centers on women's issues.

IV. Building Alliances

By building alliances, efforts are made to bring women leaders into a closer relationship of support and interaction with the various organizations of civil society. Equal opportunity and gender equity will be fostered, with a clearer definition of the relationship between the state and civil society and the level at which the proposed actions should be carried out.
a. Promote the forging and strengthening of alliances, networks, and coalitions of women leaders at the national, subregional, and regional levels.
b. Encourage cooperation between national and international bodies to assist women in their advancement to positions of leadership.
c. Enhance participation by women's organizations in promoting female leadership.
d. Develop cooperation in the areas of research, financing, and publicity needed to reinforce female leadership.
e. Promote women's participation and their full exercise of citizenship, by organizing events such as conferences or town-hall meetings where women can express their opinions about the policies that affect them.
f. Encourage greater cooperation between the CIM and civil society organizations in the member countries, to coordinate their actions on behalf of women's leadership at all levels.

V. Recommendations to the CIM for Monitoring Progress under the Plan of Action

Implementation of the action steps set out above will require the identification of funding mechanisms. The Inter-American Commission of Women will need to develop a system for monitoring progress under the Plan of Action, which should be submitted to the Assembly of Delegates for approval together with the Plan itself. That system should include the following measures:
a. Host meetings, with the cooperation of the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy and other agencies of the inter-American system, to promote the political participation of women as a means of strengthening democracy and as tangible evidence that the obstacles blocking women's access to decision-making are being overcome.
b. Support the design and implementation of subregional training programs for women leaders.
c. Carry out more intensive coordination and lobbying activities with the international financial agencies, and encourage the preparation and submission of regional and subregional projects.
d. Identify the funding resources needed to implement the CIM Plan of Action in the area of leadership.
e. Provide a constant flow of information to member states on the various sources of funding for leadership projects.

f. Encourage the appointment of women to decision-making positions in the OAS General Secretariat.

g. Conduct studies and activities to facilitate creation of an Inter-American Institute for Women's Leadership Training.