

**FOLLOW UP OF THE INTER-AMERICAN PROGRAM
ON THE PROMOTION OF WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS
AND GENDER EQUITY AND EQUALITY-**

SEPIA III-GENDER AND Education
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**Proposals on Gender and Education
in the framework of the Third Meeting of Ministers of Education**

Final Document

I. Declaration of the Third Meeting of Ministers of Education

The Ministers of Education of member states of the Organization of American States, gathered on the occasion of the Third Meeting of Ministers of Education in Mexico City, August 11-13, 2003, undertook to promote *"the principles of equity, quality, relevance, and efficiency at all levels of the education system, ensuring, by 2010, universal access to and completion of quality primary education for all children and to quality secondary education for at least 75 per cent of young people, with increasing graduation rates and lifelong learning opportunities for the general population; and eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005,"* in keeping with the mandate of the Third Summit of the Americas.

These objectives are consistent with the recognition that education is among the tools that make it possible to achieve greater social equity and overcome and, ultimately, eradicate poverty, as well as a means to facilitate the creation of human capital tailored to the demands of a globalized world. In addition, the Declaration refers to the necessary commitment of educational systems to democracy, social justice, and *"individual dignity and avoiding all discrimination and intolerance."*

The Declaration points to the need to prioritize expenditure and investment in education, including scientific research, technological development, and the dissemination and preservation of cultural diversity, while also calling on governments to develop strategies to improve the funding of education in such a way as to involve political organizations, legislatures, and the media. The Declaration underscores how important it is for all sectors, particularly of civil society, to cooperate in order to achieve the objectives proposed.

The Declaration urges all countries to incorporate in their respective educational programs the principles of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, especially those that have to do with *"education as key to strengthening democratic institutions, promoting the development of human potential, and alleviating poverty and fostering greater understanding among our peoples."*

The Declaration emphasizes the part played by information in the process of improving education, particularly by moving forward in expanding and disseminating indicators of educational quality and quantity, while at the same time creating the necessary capabilities within the ministries for thus use of this tool.

Particularly to be underscored is the effort to focus on the most deprived groups in society in order to ensure equal opportunity for all sectors. The Declaration also reaffirms the

commitment to implement different mechanisms to expand educational coverage, keep children in school, and reduce school drop-out rates.

Technical education is accorded an important place because it is a way to prepare young people for working life and enhance their innovative skills and initiative.

The Inter-American Commission on Education (CIE) is urged to continue to develop projects in the areas of equity and quality, education, training, evaluation, and teacher training, with cross-cutting use of the new communication and information technologies.

The Mexico Declaration underscores throughout that equity and quality of education are basic principles that are essential for an improvement in the general standard of living, particularly in the poorest sectors of society. It describes how it has been possible to eliminate gender disparities in relation to equal opportunity for both men and women in terms of access to primary and secondary education. It also emphasizes how important it is to avoid all discrimination and intolerance in educational systems.

From the gender point of view, equity in education is apparent – in addition to equality of opportunities in coverage for men and women at all levels of education – in other aspects which should be borne in mind when proposing the incorporation of a gender approach throughout the educational process.

One of these is the elimination of factors that have an impact on the drop-out rate of boys and girls from schools and which reflect traditional gender relations: girls drop out of school in order to help at home; the incidence of early pregnancy, also have a significant impact. Likewise, the main motive for boys to drop out of school is the need to enter the work force, to assume a role as secondary provider of goods needed by the family.

Another factor to note is that gender orientation influences the different ways boys and girls choose activities or careers. Generally boys are steered towards activities that have to do with science or technology; girls are usually steered towards service-related activities and, in particular, towards those that have to do with caring for other people - tasks that are perceived as feminine. This fact reproduces and exacerbates the sexual division of the labor market and translates into one of the main discriminatory factors in the labor market.

Teacher training is one of the areas in which the greatest change can be effected from a gender perspective in the education system. If teachers can pass on to their pupils values based on gender equity as expressed in the principles of gender equity and recognition of diversity, and behave in a non-discriminatory way in classrooms, they will be promoting fundamental changes in the way boys and girls learn to live together.

The Declaration highlights the importance of continuing and extending the Summit Project based on indicators. (Regional Project on Indicators in Education). This initiative should be enhanced by introducing indicators that make it possible to measure over time the comparative progress made amongst men and women in those issues that are particularly relevant to gender equity.

II. The framework for incorporating a gender perspective in education

The Priority Action Areas of CIM's Strategic Plan of Action states that gender-sensitive education is the way to shape new values and change attitudes. It is essential for guaranteeing women's full exercise of their rights, to enable them to participate in political activities at all levels, enter and remain in the labor market and improve their quality of life. In education, the CIM proposes working towards producing and inducing socio-cultural change, and breaking down stereotypes in domestic and labor roles in order to create an awareness that men and women should share both public and private responsibilities. It will concern itself in general with the education of women at all stages of life and give special attention to training programs for population groups who have habitually been ignored by the educational system, such as minority groups, rural populations, marginalized urban populations, indigenous peoples, and other ethnic groups.^[1]

The Inter-American Program on the Promotion of Women's Human Rights and Gender Equity and Equality in its specific objective no. 5 urges the member states of the OAS to promote gender equity and equality and women's human rights, among others, by achieving full and equal access to "education at all levels and to the various fields of study." This appeal is reaffirmed (specific objective no. 8) with the "elimination of cultural patterns or stereotypes that denigrate the image of women, particularly in educational materials..."^[2] The same program calls for the adoption of measures needed to encourage the agencies of the inter-American system to incorporate a gender perspective in their work, along with other actions to be taken by the General Secretariat of the OAS.

CIM's proposal to incorporate the gender perspective in education is based on the premise that, in addition to being a mechanism for social and economic mobility and integration, and a means of overcoming poverty, it is an exceptionally good arena in which to promote cultural changes that may facilitate the achievement of gender equity and equality. Although equal access by women to all levels of education represents a fundamental step forward, there are other factors related to the potential gains from educating boys and girls in the values of equity, tolerance, respect for diversity, and a civic spirit.

Education with a gender dimension is conceived as the molding of boys and girls from their earliest years in the principles of equity and equality between the sexes. This makes it possible to overcome major barriers based on gender inequity, including equal access to the labor market; it sets in motion a process of cultural change both for men and for women such as responsible fatherhood and equal distribution of domestic chores, and furthermore creates the conditions for the empowerment of women and finally the construction of a more just and equitable society.

III. Observations of the Meeting on Gender and Education of the CIM on the Declaration of the III Meeting of Ministers of Education

The meeting on SEPIA III studied the Mexico Declaration. The following deficiencies were noted, for emphasis, with a view to their consideration and incorporation in subsequent activities to follow up on the Meeting of Ministers, and to ensuring that they are incorporated in education policies in all ministries of education in the member states:

Funding

With a view to enhancing the funding of educational reform:

- a. The entity and/or entities with responsibility for public finance and, as appropriate, other executive branch entities, must be involved.
- b. Additional resources must be allocated to research on education and gender and to university budgets for such purposes.
- c. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation organizations must also be involved in funding education with a gender perspective.

Continuing education

Education throughout all life cycles must promote the self-sufficiency of women

Indicators

In respect of high school graduation rates, it is suggested that ranges be established at the secondary level that pertain to the different regions and the different characteristics of each country and region.

Develop and use qualitative indicators of gender and education differentiated in keeping with the cultural realities of each country.

Draw up a more precise list of gender indicators.

Statistics on gender and education must be broken down not only by women and men, but among categories of women, with a view to identifying and targeting existing gaps.

Gender-neutral language

Include gender-neutral language in titles, documents, and other instruments emanating from the educational system.

Education and employment

Ensure that educational success translates into employment on more occasions without gender discrimination.

Dropping out of school as a result of pregnancy, motherhood, or sexual harassment.

To prevent dropping out of school as a result of early pregnancy, motherhood, sexual harassment, or loss of opportunity to breastfeed, legislation or protective ministerial provisions and support services must be adopted.

Training and continuing education in gender within the educational community

Training of women and men teachers in the gender perspective, as they transmit and bear witness to values and attitudes which, at times, support or reinforce gender bias in education, rather than promoting change in such values and attitudes.

Training of men and women educational administrators is as essential as the training of women and men teachers owing to the part they play in preventing physical and psychological abuse of girls and boys and protecting them from it.

The educational community must also participate in education programs with a gender perspective.

IV. Proposals for incorporating the gender perspective in education

The incorporation of the gender perspective requires an overall approach to ensure that initiatives in different areas are mutually reinforcing. Complementary proposals arise from each specific area, which act in parallel to narrow the gender equality gaps and reduce sexual discrimination in education.

To ensure the practical application of proposals aimed at achieving gender equality in education, spheres of action have been established based on the guidelines of the Third Meeting of Ministers of Education and targets for meeting these requirements have been identified, along with the actions needed to achieve them.

1. Ensuring equal opportunity for men and women in access to all levels of the educational system.

Women and girls are referred to as vulnerable groups eligible to receive priority attention. However, this prevents them from receiving specific treatment. In particular this applies to women in the rural sectors who, in various countries in the Hemisphere, still lag behind in terms of literacy and general level of education. The need to overcome this is even more urgent when the multiplier effect of the education of mothers is taken into account both in relation to children attending and staying in the education system and in improvements to family health and, in particular, in combating poverty among the poorest households in the region. It also has a major impact on other aspects of social development, such as maternal and child mortality, the health, nutrition, and education of new generations, population and environmental control, social integration, and the development of a sense of civic pride and spirit.

On the other hand, the school drop-out rate has been identified as one of the most serious problems affecting education systems. If this phenomenon is analyzed by sex, one finds that the sexist patterns in society are reproduced. Household surveys carried out periodically in the countries of the region investigating the causes of failure to complete the secondary cycle show that the causes differ significantly between the sexes.

Males leave primarily to work or to look for work, while females leave because of family problems. The main causes of drop out rate of women include: poverty, early pregnancy or motherhood, paid and unpaid domestic work, sexual harassment, child prostitution, migration in search of work, as temporal workers.

Objective 1.1. Promoting equal access and continued attendance of boys and girls in preschool, basic, and secondary education

Actions:

- Make the necessary changes in legislation with a view to removing legal barriers – where they exist - to equal opportunities for access to and remaining in education, and for graduation, for men and women (compulsory preschool and basic education for boys and girls).
- Implement programs to raise awareness among mothers, fathers, or others with responsibility for education decisions, particularly those belonging to the most disadvantaged groups in urban and rural areas with regard to the importance of boys and girls attending school and staying in the educational system.

- Carry out studies to identify the causes of school drop-outs at the different educational levels, by sex, with a view to designing actions and policies to deal with this problem.
- To implement affirmative action to prevent discrimination and enable pregnant adolescents and teenage mothers to remain in school.
- Creation pilot financial support programs for low-income families intended to keep boys and girls in school.

Objective 1.2. To increase the educational level of women, in particular, those who are in situations of greater vulnerability.

Actions:

To carry out programs directed at:

- Literacy for adult women, relating such literacy training to work training as part of development projects - especially those belonging to the most disadvantaged groups- in accordance with their requirements (timetables, child care), language and culture, as well as the particular characteristics of the communities in which they live, creating extra support for functional illiterates (through lack of use of the reading and writing skills acquired.)
- Literacy for adult women will also be linked to work, development projects, and the demands of women for their rights.
- Literacy training for preadolescent girls (age 9), in countries where this applies.
- Focused reinforcement of education for groups of women in disadvantaged circumstances such as: women belonging to the most disadvantaged groups, women with disabilities, poor women of urban and rural areas, heads of household, teenage mothers, refugees, women deprived of liberty, taking advantage of complementarily and linkage with other related institutional programs or services (in particular those directed to career education and the exercise of their human rights of women).
- Continuing education, aimed particularly at mature women of the most vulnerable sectors.
- Preparation and free distribution of educational material with easily read contextual content and linguistically and culturally pertinent material for such focused literacy; and educational reinforcement, with a view to promoting reading and writing.

2. Promoting non-sexist education

A high percentage of young people pursue careers that reproduce traditionally feminine roles, such as careers in education and health, which are precisely those that carry lower status and pay less. The signals sent by teachers to boys and girls alike from the primary level upwards are reflected in the choices made by the young. In general, more attention is given to educating boys, rather than girls, in the sciences. At secondary school, career guidance directs boys and girls towards interests pre-established according to their sex. In

this way, the hidden curriculum, which distinguishes between the treatment and guidance of boys and girls, defines the preferences of each group.

The images that appear in school texts also play an important role in this respect. Although some countries have now started to revise school texts from a gender perspective, in the framework of the educational reforms being implemented, many stereotypical images of men and women according to traditional gender roles persist. In some cases, women are depicted as less important than men.

A sexist vocational direction starting in the school system excludes a large population of women from the science and technology labor market. They are thereby marginalized in terms of productive state-of-the-art activities, which are those in most supply now that markets are being transformed as a result of economic integration and globalization.

In higher education, the segmentation of university careers is still visible and results in some courses attracting a high percentage of women while in others they are in the minority. Proposals for redirecting higher education must aim at expanding career choices for men and women by encouraging both groups to explore careers in which they have not been equally represented.

Another aspect to take into account relates to the rapid changes and innovations arising from technology, connectivity, and communication, which must be made to serve the cause of education, and especially, put an end to the poor quality of education in the most isolated and vulnerable sectors. Traditionally, fewer women have been found in areas linked to the use of technology because of sex-based role attribution. The use of technology in education must aim especially at attracting young and adolescent girls towards innovations and avoid sexist orientation.

The challenge to create educational environments conceived as learning communities naturally falls also to teachers, who in this scenario are responsible for promoting democratic values, equity, and tolerance as opposed to authoritarianism and rigid hierarchies. Thus it is necessary to incorporate principles that promote these values in teacher training, particularly the principle of non-discrimination on grounds of gender at all levels of the educational system.

Objective 2.1. Eliminate gender discrimination in educational curricula and introduce new topics

Actions:

To review curricula, incorporating a gender perspective at all levels and areas of knowledge in the activities, spaces, language, materials, classroom relationships, career guidance, and school organization and administration. Emphasis should be placed on reforming teacher training curricula and ongoing professional development courses.

- Promote co-educational participation of male and female students in special courses or extra-curricular activities by eliminating sexist stereotypes or obstacles.
- Promote or, as appropriate, include, in school textbooks, and other educational resources (audiovisual, multimedia, etc.) balanced content and images of the capacities, functions, and contributions of men and women by eliminating gender-based stereotypes. The use of gender-neutral language should be emphasized.

- Include at all educational levels curricular objectives pertaining to:
 - a. Age-appropriate sex education and sexual and reproductive health;
 - b. Human rights of women, education and culture in and for democracy, ethical values, the exercise of full citizen participation, and for active participation and empowerment of women for the purpose of promoting democratic governance and the peaceful resolution of disputes; and Participation of women for respect for ecology and the environment.
- Implement programs to raise awareness and knowledge of the gender perspective in training and ongoing professional development courses of teachers and staff of the corresponding departments directed towards:
 - a. career guidance;
 - b. encouragement of science and technology in daily life and professional training;
 - c. political participation ; and
 - d. development of creativity and a culture of peace.

Objective 2.2. Promote egalitarian career guidance for men and women

Actions:

- Eliminate sexist stereotypes in teaching practices such as the transmission of messages that promote gender inequity, the differential use of space by men and women, or that overlook or ignore the needs and interests of male and female students.
- Encourage girls and women to choose courses of study and careers from which they have traditionally been excluded, especially in the fields of science and technology, as well as promote the use of technology in their work activities as well as their daily lives.

3. Use of the education system to encourage greater participation of women in the labor force

The increase in basic education coverage and in the number of students enrolled in secondary education has not yielded the expected results in terms of the entry of young people –men and women- into the labor market. Given that only a small percentage of young men and women reach higher education, any redefinition of the direction of education from the basic level should be geared towards appropriate training- for the labor market and, consequently, increasing the human capital of the countries of the region. For women, this education requires particular attention insofar as their work options are limited by prevailing stereotypes in relation to male and female jobs, the latter being more restricted and less valued in the labor market. In many instances, the choices available to women are limited to low productivity, informal employment or domestic employment because inadequate training for other better paid occupations that would give them the necessary financial autonomy to allow them to maintain themselves and their families.

Objective 3.1. Increase the employment potential of women

Actions:

- Strengthen coordination between the training system, agencies for job training and the productive sector to determine needs, update job profiles, develop [a clearinghouse of information on supply and demand for labor in order to identify

existing demand that could be used to define possibilities for the employment of women].

- Design and implement complementary programs at the different levels of the educational system, directed towards:
 - Developing capacity to achieve key skills to enhance employment potential and enable women, especially the poorest, to project themselves, adapt, and change their environment.
 - Professional and technical training to direct women towards dynamic activities with development potential as well as to improve their access to management and supervisory functions, especially in areas where they are underrepresented.
 - To promote the flexibilization of school and workday schedule
 - to ensure the training and employability of women with family
 - responsibilities.

4. Contribute to the strengthening of education ministries from a gender perspective.

The modernization and strengthening process advocated by the ministers of education is an opportunity to include the principles of equality of opportunities. In this context, coordination through national mechanisms for the equality of women in the respective countries is fundamental, both with respect to drawing up joint programs and monitoring advances in education from a gender perspective.

Objective 4.1. Promote inter-institutional coordination for achieving gender objectives in education

Actions:

- Set up and strengthen gender units and institutional mechanisms (advisory bodies, units, and programs on gender and gender equity) within the ministries of education, national machineries for gender equality and coordinate or generate interagency coordination between the ministries of education and other government focal points related to education.
- Design and implement, as appropriate, programs in coordination with national mechanisms for the equality of women in the respective countries, aimed at:
 - Sensitizing and training those charged with the formulation of educational policies and programs in gender issues and securing the budgetary commitments to implement the policies.
 - Sensitizing and training teachers in the gender perspective, sex education, equity, development, and overall continuing education to ensure their application in the classroom. To the extent possible, these programs should be installed within ministries of education within their program and budgetary structure.

Objective 4.2. Evaluate on an ongoing basis gender gaps in education

Actions:

- Strengthen the statistical and information technology systems of ministries to develop sex desegregated data.

- Draw up a set of quantitative and qualitative indicators to monitor the inclusion of the gender perspective in education policies, and in studies of the impact of education in closing the salary gap, in coordination with the national statistics offices in the respective countries.
- Incorporate gender quantitative and qualitative indicators in education in the Regional Education Indicators Project.
- Strengthen mechanisms for dialogue and consultation between ministries of education and civil society organizations specializing in gender and education.

5. Eliminate sexist messages and materials in the media and encourage the media to educate society on gender equality

The media perform an educational function and through the material they make public they can either help to establish a multi-faceted image of women and their contributions to culture or reinforce sexist approaches. For that reason it is important to sensitize those who influence and manage the media to encourage them to promote gender equity and equality. An effort should also be made to foster dialogue between the institutions responsible for the educational system and the media to enhance training and information about gender equity and equality.

Objective 5.1. Encourage the media, as educators in our society, to contribute to the elimination of sexist messages

Actions:

- Sensitize the media on gender equity and equality, eliminating sexist messages
- Establish mechanisms to link institutional entities with responsibility for the educational system with entities responsible for the media, with a view towards encouraging training and information on gender equity and equality as a contributing element to the development of a nation and a society.

[1] Strategic Action Plan of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM)

[2] Inter-American Program on the Promotion of Women's Rights and Gender equity and equality (CIM/Res.209/98 and AG/Res.1625 (XXIX-O/99))