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Plan of Action of the Summit of the Americas – Proposals for Gender Integration at the Fourth Summit[1]

(Item 2 - Dialogue of the Heads of Delegation)

The Plans of Action approved by the Summits of the Americas have all approached the integration of a gender perspective differently. Although there has been an increased focus on gender equity and equality as central and important for all member states, the issue has yet to be fully integrated as a cross cutting theme into all areas addressed in these forums. Women have been mentioned in general terms or included with disadvantaged or vulnerable populations. Their contribution to society and their potential have not been fully taken into account and a gender perspective has not been fully integrated in topics such as human rights, property, trade and investment, among others.

The Special Summit of the Americas, held in Monterrey, México in 2004, reiterates that "the empowerment of women, their full and equal participation in the development of our societies, and their equal opportunities to exercise leadership are fundamental for the reduction of poverty, the promotion of economic and social prosperity, and for people-centered sustainable development". The governments reiterated their commitment to "continue promoting gender equality and equity and the mandates of the Summits of the Americas on this matter".

The next Summit of the Americas has as its theme, "Creating Employment to Confront Poverty and Strengthen Democratic Governance." The Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), as technical advisor to the Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG) on all aspects of gender equity and equality, was mandated to formulate recommendations on gender mainstreaming to be included in the Summit preparation process. In this context, and to implement the Inter-American Program on the Promotion of Women's Human Rights and Gender Equity and Equality (IAP), the CIM has also made recommendations to the Ministerial Meetings of Labor, Justice, Education, and Science and Technology.

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[1] This document is based on the document CIM/REMIM-II/doc.5/04 and on the recommendations emanated from the experts meeting (SEPIA I and III), presented by the CIM to the Ministerial Meetings of Labor and Education.

Because poverty reduction is a multi-dimensional task, requiring a multi-sectoral approach, the CIM's recommendations to the Fourth Summit specifically focus on education, labor and trade, as key areas for the economic empowerment of women, for confronting poverty and for strengthening democratic governance.

The policy spectrum can be expanded from each of these perspectives, but the objective is to prioritize the ones that address the three fields; in other words, educational policy instruments that reinforce the incorporation of women into the labor market, linked to exportable productive activities

I. Gender Inequalities in Education and the Labor Market

Gender inequalities persist in the areas of education and employment.

Education is the principal mechanism for social mobility, integration, and overcoming poverty, and occupies a privileged space in promoting cultural changes, thus facilitating the attainment of gender equity. The following table summarizes the current status of gender and education in the region.

EDUCATION AND GENDER	
LEVEL	**DIAGNOSIS**
General	Increase in enrollment rates at all levels.
Primary education	No significant gender bias.
Secondary and technical education	Higher failure/drop-out rates for girls than for boys. Youth labor, together with early pregnancies, are the main reasons that girls drop out of secondary school.
Higher education	Segregation in selection of studies.

With regard to gender and labor, the labor market is the fundamental space where equal opportunities between men and women are possible, and where many advances have been made in recent decades throughout the world, but where shortcomings are still seen. The labor situation of women is directly linked to education and training.

Insertion into the labor force determines many areas of life for both men and women, ranging from their economic independence and the decision-making potential that it implies, to the possibility of enjoying an old age under the protection of either public or private formal health care and pension systems.

There has been a substantive increase in the work force participation rate of women, although it is still less than for men. The greatest increase has been for less educated women. This has been the trend since the 1960s, and it is expected to continue in the coming years.

LABOR MARKET AND GENDER	
ASPECTS	**DIAGNOSIS**
Incorporation in the labor market	Lower female employment rates, despite an increase in recent decades.
Unemployment	Higher rates of unemployment, especially among young workers and workers with middle-level skills.
Wage gaps	Based on differences in qualifications or skills, as well as pure gender discrimination.
Job selection	Importance of segregation of the sexes by occupations.
Part-time work	Feminization of part-time jobs. It is not know whether or not it is what women want.
Seasonal work	Depends on the productive sector (very prevalent in agriculture and tourism.
Informal job market	Greater presence of women, especially in areas such as agriculture, retail sales, handicrafts, sales of food, house-keeping services, etc.
Labor rights	As a result of biological, cultural, and social conditions, women as a whole are more likely to lose their jobs, and to suffer harassment, etc.
Business owners	Difficulties in owning their own businesses, because of reduced access to financing and the means of production.

The quality of female employment is far from what it is for males, from the standpoint of such factors as productivity, remuneration, job stability, the existence of contracts, respect for work hours, hygiene, health risk coverage, pensions, among others.

II. Gender and Trade Issues

Inclusion of a gender perspective in trade issues is based on an extremely important limitation linked to the fact that, to a great extent, women work in jobs that are non-negotiable and non-marketable internationally, such as the retail trade, care of the home, children, and the elderly, education, health services, and the like.

It is possible to look at the quality of the international insertion of the region and to focus mainly on groups where there is a larger participation of women, such as low-technology manufacturing, and specifically textiles, without neglecting the rest.

Latin America and the Caribbean as a whole have slightly increased their participation in the world market, from 5.78% to 6.29% of total international trade during the period 1985-2001. The most important factors are natural resources and based on them, although the production of process goods not based on natural resources has proven to be the most dynamic sector, and especially those requiring mid-level and high technology. This fact, which is very positive for the region, means, however, that attention must be drawn to gender policies. The most feminized sectors are not only the ones that contribute the lowest added value, but are also the ones which, in commercial terms, are losing their vitality and momentum in the development of trade in manufactures.

Free trade has led to an increase in the participation of women in the labor market in several countries, especially through participation in the "*maquila*" sector. The lower wages paid to women workers serve to attract direct foreign investment. However, it is important to bear in mind that this type of insertion in the international market leads countries to a situation of unequal growth.

III. Identification of Weaknesses, Threats, Strengths, and Opportunities

The following table schematically presents information on outside threats and opportunities -which cannot be directly controlled by national governments- and internal strengths and weaknesses- where national or regional governments could intervene- in the fields of education, the labor market, and production and trade. It is important to bear in mind that many of the factors identified as belonging to the internal scenario are also present on a worldwide basis.

DAFO ANALYSIS: WEAKNESSES, THREATS, STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES					
WEAKNESSES (internal)			STRENGTHS (internal)		
Education	**Work/production**	**Trade**	**Education**	**Work/production**	**Trade**
Small budget allocated to social policy. Little access by women to advanced studies. Segregation of courses of study for women towards less valued branches.	Lower employment and higher unemployment rates for women. Small budget allocated to labor policies. Greater presence of women on the informal market and in part-time jobs. Wage disparities between men and women with similar qualifications, and among women based on level of education. Segregation of occupations (based on social and educational aspects).	Employment of women in activities not present in the international marketplace. Specialization of Latin America based on static comparative advantages (cheap labor and natural resources). Importance of activities linked to natural resources, either directly or through manufactures, in Latin America. Low technology manufactures are much more dynamic than higher technology manufactures in capturing a market share.	Increase in enrollment rates, especially in primary schools. Increase in training of women. Increase in the education budget.[2]/ High returns on education, greater as one moves higher on the educational scale.	Increase in the work rate. Reduction of wage gaps. Reduction of segregation by sex. Better training and opportunities to participate in the labor market.	Gain in world market shares of manufactures not based on natural resources. The dynamic performance of manufactures not based on natural resources is based on middle-level and high technology manufactures. A move towards export diversification and establishment of competitive companies.

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[2]. In 1990, 2.9% of GDP was allocated, as compared with 4.2% in 2001.

DAFO ANALYSIS: WEAKNESSES, THREATS, STRENGTHS, AND OPPORTUNTIES					
WEAKNESSES (internal)			STRENGTHS(internal)		
Education	**Work/production**	**Trade**	**Education**	**Work/production**	**Trade**
	Precarious working conditions generate less social protection (pensions, unemployment, benefits, etc.). Fewer women belong to labor unions. Greater presence of women in small and less productive companies. Higher unemployment rates for women, especially among youth and women with middle-level skills in urban areas. Less participation in ownership of the means of production and reduced access to financing.	Low technology manufactures are much more dynamic than middle-level ones in capturing world market shares. The share of exports of natural resources continues to be very high.			The share of exports of manufactures is increasing, especially for high and mid-level technology manufacturer, among total Latin American exports.

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DAFO ANALYSIS: WEAKNESSES, THREATS, STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES					
THREATS (external)			OPPORTUNITIES (external)		
Education	**Work/production**	**Trade**	**Education**	**Work/production**	**Trade**
Education inflation Global trend to reduce the size of government and its social investment. Privatization of education. Girls more vulnerable to crises and likely to leave school.	A high degree of job rotation, based on factors such as the need to take care of reproductive responsibilities.	South America is losing importance in the world market. Areas of international trade with a larger female presence: agriculture and textiles. Difficulties in specializing in export production with a high value added, because of tariff caps prevalent in feminized jobs. Trade policies are implemented on a neutral basis from a gender perspective.	Greater importance given to aligning supply and demand.	Growing inclusion of women in the labor market. Modernization of gender policy, introduction of labor and economic policies (productive development of women as agents of production). Large-scale ratification of ILO conventions. Strengthening of social protest movements against inequalities.	Slight increase in the presence of Latin America on the global market. Increased interest in introducing a gender perspective in trade policy. Strengthening of social movements protesting inequalities.

IV. Recommendations for the inclusion of a gender perspective in education, labor, and trade policies

The following policy recommendations link the areas of education, labor, and trade from a gender perspective, and at the same time are designed to minimize weaknesses and threats and maximize strengths and opportunities.

These recommendations reflect those previously proposed to the Ministerial Meetings of Labor and Education (SEPIA I and SEPIA III) in the context of the implementation of the Inter-American Program on the Promotion of Women's Human Rights and Gender Equity and Equality (IAP).

FOCUS ON EDUCATION

- Prioritize expenditure and investment in education; develop strategies to improve funding that involve political organizations, legislature, the media and civil society; enhance the effectiveness of government expenditures.

- Increase investment in occupational training, from both the private and public sectors.

- Modify the approach to education so as to make it non-sexist. Revise curricula accordingly. Provide teacher training and community education initiatives.

- Enhance efforts to train women at all educational levels, including primary, secondary, and university, as well as occupational training at the work place. Provide incentives to complete the educational process.

- Encourage training in nontraditional fields for women.

- Instruct women in new technologies.

- Implement measures to correct segregation by sex in education, with incentives for women to go into "non-traditional" fields of study.

- Establish the school-to-work continuum, linking education, the demands of the work force and the strategy for trade diversification. Ensure the viability of education by adapting it to meet demand, while at the same time respecting the concept of education as the realization of human potential.

- Develop education strategies and programs for communities with special education needs such as ethnic minorities, and rural and marginalized people.

FOCUS ON LABOR AND PRODUCTION

- Analyze gender policies from a realistic perspective, that takes into account women as producers and consumer.

- Focus on positive policies, including positive discrimination.

- Legalize or regulate the informal market.

- Regulate part-time and seasonal work.

- Enact legislation requiring employers and employees to participate in financing pension funds, and increase government support and participation.

- Ensure that employment activities and contracts include retirement and health care benefits.

- Monitor wage disparities caused by sex discrimination between men and women with the same levels of skills and responsibilities.

- Monitor and improve the working conditions and the quality of jobs for women. Defend the labor rights of female workers, including vacations, overtime, social benefits, among others.

- Promote the right of women to collective bargaining and participation in labor-related organizations, including labor unions, company committees, among others.

- Encourage the development and implementation of projects designed to promote the productivity and competitiveness of highly feminized activities, such as:
  - -Agriculture, facilitating associations to permit greater economies of scale, access to technology, assistance in marketing, etc.
  - -Industry, promoting EPZs for activities consistent with the national development strategy.
  - -Services, regulating services outside the market.

- Establish and implement policies in support of small and medium-sized businesses: innovative projects, access to technology, connection with outside markets (fairs, expositions, etc.), institutional coordination, among others.

- Strengthen the organizations responsible for micro-financing, through micro-credit and financing programs for micro businesses, accompanied by development of access to services (marketing, technical assistance, respect for the environment).

- Focus on reconciling responsibilities at home with work, through school dining facilities, child care centers, laundromats, and, outside the workplace, centers for the elderly, among others.

FOCUS IN THE AREA OF TRADE

- Provide special focus on trade liberalization measures affecting the most highly feminized sectors, which are generally low technology sectors and services that cannot always be marketed internationally.

- Provide for trade diversification, to include a wider product variety, more dynamic industries and more destinations, by coordinating various financing instruments, such as venture capital funds, company incubators, guarantees, cooperatives for marketing nontraditional products, and the like, with special terms and conditions for women.

- Take advantage of market openings among the dynamic products in international trade

In summary, efforts should be directed to the sectors, sub-sectors and/or products which participate in world trade and which have a strong female presence, either working from the standpoint of education or the labor market.

Coordination of instruments can be from a unilateral, bilateral, or multilateral standpoint. Once weaknesses and threats, and strengths and opportunities, have been identified, the policies required to minimize the potential negative effects and maximize the positive aspects can be coordinated.

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