Inter-American Commission of Women

Securing Women’s Rights and Gender Equality in the Americas

Organization of American States
The CIM links the commitments undertaken by States at the international level with effective public policies at the national level in order to support the full exercise of women’s civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.
The Inter-American Commission of Women: Securing Women’s Rights and Gender Equality in the Americas
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ABOUT
Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM)
1.1. Brief history

The CIM was established during the Sixth International Conference of American States (Havana, 1928) to prepare “juridical information and data of any other kind which may be deemed advisable to enable the Seventh International Conference of American States to take up the consideration of the civil and political equality of women in the continent.”

The Ninth International Conference of American States (Bogotá, 1948) approved the first Statute of the Commission, which consolidated its structure and authorized the Secretary General of the OAS to establish the Secretariat of the CIM. In 1953, the Commission signed an agreement with the OAS under which it was recognized as a permanent inter-American specialized organization with technical autonomy in the pursuit of its objectives.

The CIM is made up of 34 Delegates, one for each OAS Member State, who is generally the Minister for Women or highest-level government authority responsible for gender equality and women’s rights issues.
The CIM pursues its objectives through the following organs:

- The Assembly of Delegates composed of the thirty-four Member States of the OAS;

- The Executive Committee elected by the Assembly and composed of representatives from nine Member States, including the President and three Vice-Presidents; and

- The Executive Secretariat, which performs the Commission’s administrative, technical, and executive functions and is located in Washington, D.C. The Executive Secretariat of the CIM also acts as the Technical Secretariat of the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI).
1.2. Mandates

To **support** Member States in their compliance with their respective international and inter-American commitments on women’s human rights and gender equality;

To **support** the efforts of Member States to promote full and equal access and participation of women in the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural spheres;

To **promote** the leadership of women in the planning and implementation of public policies and programs;

To **advise** the OAS in all matters related to women’s rights and gender equality;

To **collaborate** with Member States, other international organizations, civil society groups, academia and the private sector in support of women’s rights and gender equality in the hemisphere;
To **report** to the General Assembly on the work of the CIM, including relevant aspects of the status of women in the hemisphere, and to elevate recommendations to the Member States in relation to the above;

To **contribute** to the development of jurisprudence on women’s human rights and gender equity and equality;

To **foster** the formulation and adoption of Inter-American instruments for the recognition of women as rights holders and agents of democracy;

To **promote** the adoption of measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women
1.3 Annual budget

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Advancing women’s rights in key areas
 Delivering results and planning for the future

Since its creation in 1928, the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) has played a leading role in securing the citizenship rights of women in the Americas. Its role as the first hemispheric forum for women’s rights and gender equality made the Commission a leader in promoting and developing international standards and public policies, including Inter-American Conventions on the Nationality of Women,
the Civil Rights of Women, the Political Rights of Women, and most recently the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Belém do Pará Convention). These binding legal instruments have been fundamental to the recognition of women as subjects of human rights and active agents of democracy.

The CIM links the commitments undertaken by States at the international level with effective public policies at the national level in order to support the full exercise of women’s civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. The Commission addresses the rights and demands of women in four key areas: (i) democracy and governance; (ii) human rights and gender-based violence; (iii) multi-dimensional security; and (iv) integral development. In these areas, the CIM provides technical support at the legal, policy, and programming levels, manages specific regional projects, and uses participatory knowledge management to ensure that policy and programming discussions and decisions are evidence-based.
2.1 Women’s substantive political citizenship for democracy and governability

Over the past five years, the OAS has been promoting consensus-building on the main challenges to strengthening democracy and governance in Latin America and the Caribbean through national dialogues and consultations, with a view to building a shared perspective on the type of democracy to which the region’s citizens aspire, as well as fresh thinking on the democratic system and new forms of political participation.

As part of this process, the CIM has strengthened its role as the main hemispheric policy forum for promoting women’s full rights and citizenship in the Americas through the organization of a series of Hemispheric Forums on Women’s Rights and Citizenship in Democratic Systems (April 2011, July 2012, September 2013, December 2014, February 2015) with the support of the Spanish
Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID). The aim of these events is to identify the policy and institutional reforms needed to guarantee the full exercise of women’s political rights and eliminate violence and harassment of women in the political sphere.

These hemispheric dialogues have brought together a broad and diverse selection of women working in the areas of democracy, policy, and women’s rights in the region, including ministers, members of parliament, ambassadors, local government officials, human rights organizations, women’s organizations and networks, activists, academics, and intergovernmental organizations.

In this context, the CIM has focused on the analysis of the exercise of women’s political rights in the hemisphere, with particular emphasis on the issue of parity. In the face of persistent political exclusion of women and the slow pace of change, in recent years States have recognized the urgency of moving forward and are beginning to re-think democracy from the perspective of parity, as both a general democratic principle, and a comprehensive strategy that aims to resolve the current deficits of representative democracies. The work of the CIM has focused on two important areas, which the Commission will seek to broaden over the next few years:
• Moving beyond quota laws and advancing towards parity between women and men in all the institutions of the State and all spaces in public and political life; and

• Addressing the elimination of political violence and harassment as a fundamental component of the full exercise of women’s political rights.

The CIM, in collaboration with UN Women and International IDEA and with the support of AECID, published two studies:

• Women’s citizenship the democracies of the Americas (2013), which presents a critical reflection on democracy from diverse perspectives, visions, concerns and proposals and contributes to the analysis of democratic systems beyond the dimension of representation and institutions, addressing
other spheres of life that are not included in the classical notion of citizenship – including gender, inter-culturalism, pluri-ethnicity, sexual and reproductive citizenship and global citizenship, among others; and

- *Banking on parity: Democratizing the political system in Latin America (Ecuador, Bolivia and Costa Rica) 2013*, which documents and analyzes, from a critical and systematic perspective, the processes that led to the adoption of parity, identifying the relevant factors and stakeholders that influenced these processes and evaluating their implementation to-date.

In July 2012 and October 2013, CIM organized hemispheric Consultations with female members of parliament, in collaboration with the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas of the Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas (COPA). These consultations brought together the chairs of the gender equity committees of the legislative and parliamentary bodies of the American nations with the aim of identifying the main problems, priorities, and strategies for placing the issue of women’s rights and gender equality on the legislative agenda, in the context of the international and inter-American commitments adopted by States.

Following-up on the CIM’s advances in this area, the future work of the Commission will prioritize:
• Development of a Toolkit on Gender Parity in Political Representation: Guidelines and Good Practices, which seeks to provide States with practical tools for the effective implementation of laws and norms on parity in political representation. A capacity-building process around this Toolkit will concentrate efforts on promoting affirmative action in policy reforms addressing issues such as campaign financing, conciliation between politics and family responsibilities, political violence and diversity, among other issues; and

• Elimination of political violence and harassment against women, including the development of a model law on violence against women in politics, and the incorporation of political violence into the work of the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belem do Para Convention (MESECVI). To-date, this has included the organization of a hemispheric Expert Group Meeting in order to identify and debate the content and structure of the Model Law on the basis of existing experiences. The CIM will also focus on preparing public information and establishing formal alliances with female legislators, in order to develop government capacities to respond to political violence, including capacity-building work with government institutions, legislators, journalists, and civil society organizations working on women’s human rights.
2.2. Women’s human rights and gender-based violence

2.2.1. Strengthening capacity for integrated monitoring of the exercise of women’s rights

The countries of the Americas have gradually adapted their national laws and policies to embrace the international and inter-American legal framework on women’s rights. According to the OECD, within the developing world, this region has made the most progress in formally recognizing the rights of women. For many women however, the laws in place at the international and national levels remain unknown or inaccessible. A number of obstacles persist to women’s full realization of their rights as human beings; from women’s ability to access education, employment with equal pay and benefits, and health and other social services, to women’s ability to negotiate sexual relations and reproduction, protect themselves from violence,
including in their own homes, and make their voices heard in political and economic decision-making.

Over the past few decades of efforts to effectively measure change and demonstrate concrete results, a number of challenges have been identified. This is particularly true in the context of efforts to measure the real exercise of women’s rights. We have laws and policies in place, but what impact have they had on the day-to-day realities of women? What are the obstacles to the real implementation of these laws and policies? What other factors come into play in supporting or preventing the implementation of public policies for women’s rights and gender equality?

The importance of effective monitoring of the exercise of women’s rights cannot be overstated – it is the crucial last step that takes us from mere lip service to women’s rights and gender equality to ensuring that these become a lived reality for women. It is essential to ensuring accountability – not just of governments but also of international organizations, donors, NGOs, and societies in general – for women’s rights, beyond the ratification of international conventions or “gender mainstreaming” efforts at the level of policies, institutions and practices. The need for a system of monitoring and evaluation has been recognized and calls have repeatedly been issued for greater attention to this issue, primarily from the women’s movement in the region.
In this context and with the support of the Government of Canada, CIM has developed an “Integrated System of Women’s Human Rights Indicators” (SISDEHM) that will provide users with two concrete benefits:

- First, it will facilitate an accurate diagnostic of the status of women’s rights in a given country, in the context of the international and inter-American agreements ratified by that country; and

- Second, it will allow for the identification of persistent barriers to the effective exercise of women’s rights, ideally pointing to specific legislative, policy or programmatic solutions to these barriers.

This System includes indicators for monitoring the full exercise of women’s rights in seven areas: economic rights; the right to work and social security; education, health, sexual rights, reproductive rights and political rights.

This SISDEHM will be used to comprehensively monitor and evaluate the implementation of agreed international commitments on women’s rights and gender equality. Published in 2015, the SISDEHM includes a general conceptual and methodological introduction to women’s human rights indicators, and a series of seven conceptual and methodological guides to facilitate the use of the SISDEHM in national planning, programming and budgeting processes.
The SISDEHM was validated through a series of national workshops in selected countries with more than 200 public sector authorities, and dialogues with key parliamentarians on the challenges they face in terms of legislating and budgeting for the full implementation of agreed international commitments on women’s human rights and gender equality, as well as monitoring progress in these areas.

As a follow-up to the establishment of the SISDEHM, CIM has developed a regional program to provide technical assistance to OAS
Member States in the implementation of the SISDEHM in national-level planning, budgeting and reporting processes, with a particular focus on key public sectors. The aim is to develop an effective national strategy to accelerate full compliance with international and inter-American commitments on women’s human rights and gender equality, on the basis of a hemispheric baseline that allows for comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of the real impact of public policies and programs.

CIM has also analyzed the legal and regulatory framework governing HIV/AIDS in the region, with a view to identifying obstacles faced by women living with or affected by HIV in the full exercise of their rights. In this context, the CIM and UNAIDS collaborated on: i) the development of a *Toolkit on the Human Rights of Women Living with HIV in Latin America*, which has been turned into a virtual course in collaboration with Development Connections, and ii) the preparation of a *Joint Report on the Social and Human Rights Dimensions of HIV/AIDS* in the Americas, which will include a chapter on the rights of women living with HIV (forthcoming).
2.2.2. Promoting, evaluating and supporting the full implementation of the Belém do Pará Convention

For the first time, the Belém do Pará Convention established mechanisms for the protection and defense of women’s rights in the struggle to eliminate violence against their physical, sexual and psychological integrity, in both the public and private spheres.

The effective implementation of the Convention requires a continuous and independent evaluation process, which in 2004 led to the creation of the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI).

MESECVI was established as a means to follow up on the commitments adopted by the States Party to the Belém do Pará Convention and facilitate technical cooperation among them, as well as with other OAS member states and permanent observers.
MESECVI serves as a systematic and permanent multilateral evaluation methodology that is based on exchange and technical cooperation between the States Party to the Convention and a Committee of Experts. This mechanism analyzes progress in the implementation of the Convention, as well as persistent challenges to an effective State response to violence against women.

In accordance with the MESECVI Strategic Plan 2014-2017, the Mechanism’s main areas of work are:

a. Strengthening the technical capacities of the National Machineries for the Advancement of Women and other relevant national sectors, particularly justice, education, health, public security, economy, authorities responsible for migrant women, authorities responsible for combating poverty, and civil society, among others;

b. Providing an inter-sectoral response to violence against women;

c. Raising social awareness of these problems, and promoting the Belém do Pará Convention;

d. Strengthening MESECVI.

In May 2013, with the support of the Government of Canada, MESECVI adopted the first System of progress indicators for measuring the im-
implementation of the *Belém do Pará Convention*, which seeks to go beyond the mere reporting of activities undertaken by the States Party and look at women’s ability to exercise their right to a life free of violence. The indicators are grouped into the six main focus areas of the Convention – legislation, national plans, specialized services, access to justice, information and statistics, and budgets – and seek to provide a more holistic and in-depth evaluation of the implementation of the Convention, as well as identify promising practices.

MESECVI has organized a series of national-level workshops in selected countries in order to strengthen their capacity to use this System of Indicators, which have brought together representatives from the National Machineries for the Advancement of Women, other government sectors such as justice, health, education, planning and budgeting and national statistics institutes, international organizations and civil society groups.
These workshops have featured two concrete tools:

- The *Guide to the Application of the Belém do Pará Convention*, which looks at existing international and inter-American jurisprudence on women’s rights and violence against women in an effort to facilitate the application of the Convention in national-level judicial processes; and

- The *Practical Guide to Using the System of Progress Indicators for Measuring the Implementation of the Belem do Para Convention*, which was developed for use during the national-level workshops and seeks to serve as a practical tool for integrating the system of indicators in national-level data-gathering, planning and budgeting processes and preparing country reports to MESECVI.
In September 2014, the MESECVI’s Committee of Experts adopted the “Declaration on Violence against Women, Girls and Adolescents and their Sexual and Reproductive Rights,” which seeks to guarantee and protect women’s human rights on the basis of commitments adopted by the States at the international level.

In November 2014, the MESECVI’s Committee of Experts carried out its first technical assistance visit to Paraguay, in order to support the
preparation and adoption of an integrated law on violence against women. The Principal Experts from Argentina, El Salvador and Paraguay met with representatives from the Government of Paraguay, civil society and national media to discuss the contents of the draft law, in light of the experiences of other countries in the region and their integrated laws on violence against women.


- Two States Party, Bolivia and Nicaragua, have approved new comprehensive laws on preventing, punishing and eradicating violence against women;
- The Venezuelan comprehensive law has been reformed to include Femicide as a criminal offence;
• Panama and Paraguay have developed draft integrated laws preventing, punishing and eradicating violence against women;
• Grenada has defined marital rape as a criminal offence;
• Bolivia has defined human trafficking as a criminal offence;
• Twelve (12) States Party have National Plans on violence against women;
• Three (3) more States Party - Colombia, Ecuador and Paraguay – have conducted national surveys on violence against women;
• Since the publication of the Declaration on Femicide (2008), nine (9) States Party have defined Femicide as a criminal offence or have included it in their legislation as an aggravated type of homicide; and
• Several States Party have amended draft laws at the request of the MESECVI: Peru decided to withdraw a draft anti-abortion law in 2013; and the Dominican Republic agreed to amend the country’s Penal Code to allow abortion in cases of rape or incest, or when the life of the pregnant woman is at risk.

In March 2013, a round-table discussion was organized on the gap between women’s rights in the law and in practice, with a view to highlighting the fact that the international and national legal framework
on women’s rights is not yet a reality for the majority of women of the hemisphere. In continuation of this line of work, in September 2013 the CIM organized an international meeting on “Women’s human rights: Good practices in gender justice,” which identified 17 good practices in gender justice and the response to violence against women, including experiences from such diverse sectors as the police, the attorney general’s office, supreme courts, the executive branch, civil society and the international community.

This initiative has spurred two new areas of work for MESECVI:

- First, the identification and dissemination of good practices in the promotion of gender justice and the implementation of the Belém do Pará Convention. From May 14th to 16th 2014, with the support of the Government of the State of Hidalgo, Mexico, the CIM held the First Belém do Pará +20 Hemispheric Forum “Good practices in the prevention of violence.” The aim of the Forum was to highlight the issue of prevention as a priority for an effective and sustainable response to violence against women, yet one in which we have made little progress due to a lack of attention, systematized knowledge and evaluation of existing efforts. The Forum considered 13 good practices in the area of violence prevention that touched on such diverse issues as legislation and public policy, education, and communication.
The Forum also adopted the *Pachuca Declaration*, which reaffirms and strengthens State commitment to concrete public policy, education and communication initiatives to achieve gender equality and prevent violence;

- These and other practices form the basis of a virtual platform of good practices in the implementation of the Belém do Pará Convention (http://www.belemdopara.org), whose aim is to facilitate concrete tools to those responsible for protecting women’s right to live free of violence. As it systematizes the work carried out to-date, the platform also serves as a permanent space for technical support and exchange of information and experiences, including good practices.

- Second, strengthening the capacity of justice officials from a perspective of human rights and gender equality. In this area, the CIM has worked with the Supreme Courts of Argentina and Mexico, the Office of the United Nations’ High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Latin American Council on Social Sciences (CLACSO) in order to develop and launch a Diploma program on “Justice, Gender and Violence.” Oriented towards judges, prosecutors, public defenders and forensic specialists, as well as other interested professionals, the Diploma program aims to provide the basic knowledge and analytical and practical tools necessary to the
effective protection of women’s human rights, on the basis of constitutional, regional and international obligations acquired by the States. The first edition of the Diploma program was launched on September 8th 2014 with support from the Supreme Court of Justice of Mexico and the Governments of Lichtenstein, Kazakhstan and Monaco and will continue until November 2015 with the participation of 40 representatives from the justice sectors in Argentina, El Salvador and Mexico.
MESECVI will continue its work with the States Party in order to build capacity and facilitate technical cooperation for the full implementation of the Convention. In 2016, MESECVI will initiate the Third Multilateral Evaluation Round to look at the progress made and challenges faced by the States Party, and will publish and disseminate the findings of this Evaluation. The results of these activities will be made available on http://www.belemdopara.org as a comparative framework of indicators of the implementation of the Convention.

Recent evaluations conducted by MESECVI have pointed to women’s access to justice as one of the primary areas of concern in terms of the full implementation of the Convention. Thus, MESECVI has prioritized the provision of technical assistance to States Party in order to strengthen women’s access to justice, the application of the Convention, and the building of comprehensive jurisprudence on women’s rights and gender equality on the basis of existing progress at the national, inter-American and international levels. MESECVI will also continue to promote the identification and exchange of good practices on gender justice and the implementation of the Belem do Para Convention among the States Party, and to build the in-house capacity of justice institutions to effectively address the causes and effects of gender-based violence and discrimination.
2.3. Citizen security from a gender perspective

Though the lack of citizen security is a problem that affects the whole population, women experience violence, dispossession, trafficking and other security threats in a different way than men. This difference is primarily a result of the social construction of gender roles and the relegation of women to the private sector. In fact, both public debate on the issue of insecurity, and the public policies and actions designed to address it, are based on indicators that reduce violence to criminal typologies that tend to exclude the violence exercised specifically against women.

In this context, CIM has worked in two main areas: broadening the scope of public/citizen security agendas to include the specific forms of violence lived by women in both the private and public spheres; and bringing a gender dimension to the hemispheric debate on the
commercialization of illicit drugs in order to better understand the involvement of women in these activities and their impact on women’s lives.

As part of its work to identify and understand women’s involvement in the commercialization of illicit substances, the CIM has prioritized systematizing and sharing existing knowledge and identifying areas where research, public policy and specific programs are needed.

In June 2013, CIM organized a roundtable discussion on women and drugs in the Americas in the framework of the 43rd session of the General Assembly of the OAS, with the aim of raising awareness among OAS Delegates and other stakeholders. The event brought together representatives from government, academia, civil society and the international community.

As a follow-up to this event, with the support of the government of Mexico, the CIM carried out and published the study *Women and drugs in the Americas: A policy working paper*, as a tool to guide policy- and decision-makers in developing and implementing public policy on the issue of drugs. The paper was launched in March
2014 during a subsequent roundtable on “Women, Drug Policy and Incarceration,” which sought to draw attention to the human rights abuses involved in the arbitrary and excessive detention of women for drug-related crimes.

In collaboration with the International Drug Policy Consortium, the Washington Office on Latin America and national-level stakeholders, CIM is working to raise awareness and build capacity among policy- and decision-makers in Costa Rica and Colombia, on a pilot basis, in order to encourage legislative and public policy reform on the basis of its existing findings on women’s involvement in the commercialization of illicit drugs.

Future work will seek to replicate these efforts in the remaining OAS Member States and to continue to build and enrich hemispheric policy debate on the issue of women and drugs, with a particular focus on the issue of incarceration and building sustainable livelihoods for women.
2.4. Integral development and women’s economic citizenship

Though the condition of poverty among the women of the Americas continues to be one of the obstacles that limits the full exercise of their economic rights, a recently-published World Bank report states that, had it not been for the 35% increase in women’s labour force participation since 1990, levels of poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean would be 30% higher.

Despite this growing participation of women in the economies of the region, they continue to face a number of barriers, including:

- The wage gap - women’s work still generates less income, less job security, less benefits, and less opportunities for advancement than men’s
• Lack of access to financial services, credit and other tools to help women entrepreneurs in the region sustainably grow their businesses

• The lack of recognition by most States of the work of social reproduction as a shared responsibility and not just “women’s work” – in fact, the same World Bank report affirms that women most often cite their burden of domestic and care work as the main obstacle to their participation in the labour force.

In this context, the CIM has been working to advance a gender equality agenda in the context of decent work, including a series of sub-regional workshops on strategic planning with a gender perspective that brought together the Ministries of Labour with the National Machineries for the Advancement of Women and a high-level dialogue among Ministerial authorities of the region to discuss the experiences, recom-
mendations, and perspectives of both government sectors, workers, and employers on achieving greater equality between men and women in the world of work.

The work of the CIM has continued to focus on institutionalization of a gender approach in the Ministries of Labour of the Americas, and cooperation in implementing the Participatory Gender Audits (PGAs) at the Ministries of Labour and the Ministries of Social Development in selected countries.

As part of its drive to advance gender equality in the context of decent work, the CIM has carried out a series of activities at the national and sub-regional levels:

- Personnel from labour and gender ministries in each sub-region have been trained to address specific needs identified in the study on Institutionalization of a Gender Approach in the Ministries of Labor of the Americas;

- A high-level policy dialogue between Ministers of Labour and National Machineries for the Advancement of Women (Ministries of Women or their equivalent) has consolidated gender equality and women’s rights on the agenda of the Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labour (IACML); and

- Follow-up to these efforts through a series of PGAs at the Ministries of Labour of Barbados, El Salvador and Peru, with
a view to supporting their efforts to mainstream a gender perspective in the operations, policies and programs.

Over the last three years, the CIM has strengthened its collaboration with high level meetings in the Americas, including Inter-American Commissions and ministerial level meetings of various sectors of integral development, such as Labor, Social Development, Sustainable Development, ICT, Ports, and Competitiveness, among others, as well as with their respective technical secretariats at the OAS and key cooperation networks. The technical advice and assistance provided by the CIM through this process is reflected in terms of its incidence in the political and technical agenda of these bodies, as well as in the formulation and implementation of policies, programs and projects.

Building on the progress made to-date with the Participatory Gender Audits initiative, the CIM will continue efforts to strengthen human and institutional capacity of the National Machineries for the Advancement of Women in OAS Member States. The main aim of this project is to ensure that the National Machineries in each State are equipped to carry out PGAs in each line Ministry at the national level, beginning with areas of strategic importance to women’s rights and gender equality (justice, health, finance, planning and budgeting, etc.)
2.5. Institutionalization of the Human Rights and Gender Equality Approach in the Work the OAS

Gender mainstreaming has been a facet of the work of development organizations since the adoption of the Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995). Twenty years later, progress on gender mainstreaming has been uneven, and is not well understood, largely as a result of lack of attention to issues such as accountability, reporting and consistent monitoring and evaluation. International organizations, governments, donor organizations and other bodies have made both general and specific commitments – adopted policies, action plans, guidelines, conducted trainings, identified indicators and conducted five- and ten-year evaluations. Still we have the idea that gender mainstreaming as a strategy has had little impact on the extent to which gender equality and women’s rights are made explicit as development goals or as organizational priorities.
Within the OAS, fifteen years of work on gender mainstreaming – within the framework of the *Inter-American Program on the Promotion of the Human Rights of Women and Gender Equity and Equality* (IAP, 2000) – have had some effect. There is a general level of awareness within the organization of the importance of gender equality and women’s rights, and a growing body of institutional knowledge and expertise within specific issue areas. However, there is still significant confusion over the purpose of “gender mainstreaming,” how it is to be done and who is responsible for it, with the result that efforts to take gender equality and women’s rights into account remain sporadic, and largely dependent on the will of individual staff members.

The *institutionalization* of a gender equality and women’s rights approach goes beyond these efforts and concentrates on building the capacity of institution to respond to the rights and demands of women in the Americas. In this context, the CIM will focus on five key strategies:

a. **Building high-level political will, commitment and accountability**

Political will must be accompanied by clear and specific policy and financial commitments to gender equality and women’s rights that are supported by obligatory reporting, monitoring and evaluation procedures.
b. **An organizational understanding, and position, on gender equality and women’s rights**

Effective action on gender equality and women’s rights requires the development, and maintenance, of an organizational understanding of the key issues involved. Not only should this understanding be clear internally, to the staff of the organization, but it should be easy to communicate to the organization’s key stakeholders.

c. **Clear, and obligatory, policy, programming and project guidelines**

An organizational vision of gender equality and women’s rights must be supported by clear guidelines for integrating this vision into the development of organizational policies, programmes and projects. The guidelines should be supported by a review and approval mechanism that mandates their utilization in a consistent manner.
d. Consistent and open dialogue among staff, supported by capacity-development

The institutionalization of a gender equality and women’s rights approach must be supported by open dialogue, in particular among the staff responsible for these issues within each Department or Secretariat and between this staff, senior management and those responsible for planning, monitoring and evaluation. This dialogue can be supported and strengthened by regular capacity-development efforts, for example in the utilization of programmatic and policy guidelines, in the gender dimensions of a particular issue of concern (i.e. the impact of natural disasters or economic crisis), or in the identification of indicators or the use of impact evaluation processes.

e. Space for evaluation and recognition of ongoing work, support and exchange of ideas

Finally, as all staff members are to be charged with a certain level of responsibility for gender equality and women’s rights issues, it is necessary to create a space where their efforts can be recognized, analyzed and supported. This internal “Community of Practice” is a space where staff can find additional resources, exchange ideas and experiences with colleagues build capacity and receive expert advice or feedback from the CIM.
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