

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE INTER-AMERICAN COMMISSION OF WOMEN (CIM)
TO THE IV SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS

INTRODUCTION

Women make up the majority of the poor and the indigent^{1/} in the Region. The feminization of poverty is tied to various factors related to labor issues, among them:

- The growing number of women heads of households living in poverty, who usually have less secure employment and earn lower wages while bearing the brunt of the reproductive burden in their households and communities;
- Women's unemployment rates, which are much higher than that of men especially young women;
- The fact that women's salaries continue to be considered complimentary, and are on average 30% less than men's;
- Women's limited access to productive resources such as work, land, capital, information, new technologies, natural resources and housing, all of which hinders their capacity to earn income, and
- Women's limited participation in decision-making in their communities.

Women living in poverty principally work in the informal sector and in low-paying jobs in the agriculture and service sectors. Because of their family obligations, they tend to work fewer years than men and thus have less access to social security systems. The problem of gender violence increases women's vulnerability and insecurity, has a negative effect on their work and the well-being of their family, and generates high costs for the State.

Studies have shown^{2/} that the income earned by women yields higher health and social benefits than that earned by men, because women tend to invest their resources in the health, education, and well-being of their families. The access of women living in poverty to productive and decent work and the adoption of measures that support their multiple roles as producers and reproducers are key strategies for achieving effective results.

1. "The adjusted femininity index of poverty in Latin America (ECLAC 2003e) was above 100 in both urban and rural areas, showing that there are more females than males in poor households. This phenomenon is most intense in the 20- to 59-year-old bracket, where an index value in excess of 100 persists throughout the decade in almost all of the countries, in both rural and urban areas". ECLAC, *Roads Towards Gender Equity in Latin America and the Caribbean*, 9th Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, Mexico City, Mexico, June, 2004. p. 18.

2. See: Buvoic, Mayra, *Women in Poverty: A New Global Underclass*, Inter-American Development Bank, Washington, D.C. , July 1998 – No, WID-101

Discrimination persists in the workplace and in family life. The female labor force is increasingly educated and many women are rising to high level positions. However, women still experience higher rates of unemployment and earn less income than men. In addressing women's issues, consideration should also be given to new variables that are modifying their situation and condition, such as growing migration and widespread violence, which includes femicide.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The CIM proposes that, in general, the governments commit to develop coordinated inter-sectoral strategies in the areas of labor, trade and education that promote the economic empowerment of women, especially women living in poverty.

It also proposes that in the Declaration, the Heads of State and Government condemn femicide, which has become alarmingly frequent in several countries of the Hemisphere, and that they commit to intensify their efforts to punish those responsible for these deaths.

This Summit should also reiterate the commitment expressed since the first Summit, to strengthen the national mechanisms for the advancement of women so as to ensure their stability and sustainability within the legal framework.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Building upon the advances made in the Quebec City Plan of Action, which recognized gender equality as a pressing social and economic issue central to the achievement of all other development goals, the CIM, as technical advisor to the Summit Implementation Review Group (SIRG) in all matters relating to gender equity and equality, presents the following recommendations:

- To integrate the gender perspective throughout the Declaration and Plan of Action of the IV Summit of the Americas, as a fundamental component of all proposed policies, programs, and initiatives.
- To use as guiding principles in implementing the initiatives to reduce poverty, and policies and programs for job creation:
 - 1) That poverty and indigence primarily affect women heads of household living in poverty.
 - 2) That the different impacts of policies and programs on men and women must be permanently taken into account;
- To give continuity and promote, in the Plan of Action of the IV Summit, the commitments on gender equity and equality and human rights already adopted at the III Summit;
- In addition to the fundamental rights of workers proclaimed by the ILO, to reaffirm the commitments to protect *human* rights;
- To make the mandates as concrete and specific as possible so as to make them more viable;
- To include in the Plan of Action of the IV Summit of the Americas concrete measures to:

- Explicitly integrate the gender perspective within the mandates of the ministries of labor, and other related institutions, as well as in their conceptual and operational frameworks, and assign specific resources for it.
- Improve labor information and statistical systems through the production of sex-disaggregated data and introduce new measurement instruments that allow information to be gathered on key issues and provide a better understanding of the situation of women, especially women living in poverty, to different government organs.
- Identify the differential impact of macroeconomic policies on men and women in the labor market as well as on income generation.
- Analyze the impact of labor and social security reforms from a gender perspective.
- Eliminate wage disparities caused by sex discrimination between men and women with the same levels of skills and responsibilities
- Quantify the social and economic contribution of unpaid work –domestic, productive and reproductive - performed by women, and promote its inclusion in national accounts.
- Analyze the current role of rural women especially with respect to migration, with a view to proposing a reorientation of sectoral policies, so as to address their specific needs
- Promote changes in the provisions of social security systems so as to extend coverage to male and female workers in the informal sector in both rural and urban sectors and including social protection for senior citizens.
- Ensure women´s access to quality reproductive health services
- Facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life responsibilities for women and men, through measures such as flexible working hours and arrangements including parental leave and support in returning to work.
- Facilitate increased access of women to nontraditional occupations, and into cutting-edge sectors of the economy including new technologies, through specific programs and training.
- Promote training programs for self-employed workers and microentrepreneurs, with emphasis on such areas as labor rights, project design, management and administration, building entrepreneurial capacity, and leadership, as well as management and quality control of the services offered by their businesses.
- Provide special focus on trade liberalization measures affecting the sectors that employ more women, 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, business incubators, guarantees, cooperatives for marketing nontraditional products, and the like, with special terms and conditions for women.
- Eliminate gender discrimination and segregation at all educational and professional training levels.
- Promote women's participation and leadership in power and decision making structures, including unions and labor organizations as a way of strengthening democratic governance.