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Position document:

## Equality and autonomy in the exercise of the economic rights of women

The Inter-American Program on the Promotion of Women's Human Rights and Gender Equity and Equality (IAP) was conceived by the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) and adopted by the General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS) in 2000. Among the key goals of the IAP, those that stand out in relation to achieving equality and autonomy in the exercise of women's economic rights are:

- ✓ promote women's equal access to work and productive resources through public policymaking with a gender perspective;
- ✓ revise, reform and enforce national legislation to comply with international commitments on gender equality and women's human rights;
- ✓ promote policies to ensure equal pay for equal work by women and men for work of equal value; and
- ✓ encourage recognition of the economic value of unremunerated work

Sixteen years after the adoption of the IAP and despite the increased insertion of women in the labour market, there are still a number of barriers to the full realization of their economic rights. According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), more than 100 million women in the region are part of the workforce. As an exception to the global trend of stagnation in women's insertion in the labour market, in Latin America and the Caribbean this share has increased 35% since 1990, which represents an important social and economic transformation. A recent World Bank report indicates that if it were not for the increase in women's insertion in the labour market, the poverty rate in the region would be 28% higher.

Despite these developments, women still have a lower relative rate of participation in employment compared to men, a higher rate of unemployment, greater participation in different forms of precarious employment (unregistered paid employment, self-employment with low productivity, part-time employment, among others), lower average income for work performed in similar conditions of occupation and education (gender pay/pay equity gap), limited access to property and inheritance, limited access to land and credit and to access and control over resources and services. This implies that women do not derive the same benefits, including the same autonomy or economic independence as men, from their participation in productive employment.

Although the region's economic recovery has reactivated salaried employment, the corresponding increase has not been enough to absorb the growing workforce, thus resulting in a trend of part-time, own-account work and, generally, employment in the informal economy. A report by the International Labor Organization (ILO) indicates that in the developing world, women represent 60% or more of the workforce in the informal economy. Women tend to enter the informal economy because it allows them greater flexibility in reconciling their productive work with their household and care responsibilities. However, increased flexibility also means greater job insecurity, less income, less or no benefits and a greater likelihood of harassment or exploitation without recourse.

As participation in social security systems is usually based on a person's labour-market position, all these factors lead to less access for women to social security. In many cases, women are dependent on the benefits derived from their partners' labour-market insertion or other segmented and generally inadequate benefits.

Women in the workforce mostly occupy self-employed, low productivity or domestic work positions, and nine out of ten lack access to social security (ILO, 2009). Persistent gender segregation in certain types of economic activities and occupations results in concentrations of women in economic sectors with lower productivity, status and income. Segregation also works vertically in the labour market where women occupy low-status positions.

Although many international agreements have recognized the value of women's work in social reproduction - including care work, as well as "... the need to promote shared responsibility of women and men in the family" (Quito Consensus, 2007), one of the most important obstacles to women's full inclusion in the economic, social and political spheres is on the one hand, the lack of recognition of the social and economic value of unremunerated domestic and care work and, on the other hand, the fact that women remain almost exclusively responsible for this work. The sexual division of labour as a structural factor is one of the most important "... inequalities and injustices which affect women within the spheres of the family, labor, politics and community affairs..." (Quito Consensus, 2007). Caregiving is a social responsibility, and care is a right - but the persistent lack of co-responsibility for family life by men and women, as well as the State and private sector's failure to provide a functional and sustainable infrastructure to support caregiving has resulted in women carrying the burden of the right to be cared, and facing a significant barrier to their full inclusion in their countries' political, economic and social life.

In this context, the Consensus of Santo Domingo (2013) contemplates care as a responsibility that must be shared by men and women, as a duty and as a right. It calls on states to:

*Wage discrimination against women persists. Currently, women's income is between 60% and 90% of men's income. Furthermore, women face barriers to accessing credit and other financial resources to start and grow their businesses.*



- Recognize the value of unpaid domestic work and adopt the necessary measures, including public policies that recognize the social and economic value of domestic work;
- Establish satellite accounts for unpaid domestic work in the countries of the region;
- Define and establish instruments for the periodic measurement of the unpaid work done by women and ensure that public budgets allocate the funds required by the machineries responsible for compiling and systematizing the information for conducting national time-use surveys.
- Recognize care as a right of people and, therefore, as a responsibility that must be shared by men and women from all sectors of society, families, private companies and the state, adopting measures, policies and care programs and promote responsibility, to release time for women to join the workforce, education and politics.
- Achieve the consolidation of public protection and social security systems by enhancing the full exercise of citizenship by women, including those who have devoted their lives to productive as well as reproductive work, both paid and unpaid, female domestic workers, rural women, female informal and contract workers, at any stage in their life cycle;

In addition, we are going through a rapid transition within families, where in some households both spouses provide labour-related income, and other households are increasingly headed by women alone, as the sole breadwinners.

All these factors combined create tension in reconciling working men and women's responsibilities in terms of the time and effort required by paid work and family responsibilities, such as care-giving to children and dependent persons, with women bearing the majority of the loss in this equation. This tension is exacerbated by an aging population and climbing life expectancy rates, resulting in an increase in older adults, many of them without access to pension or retirement funds to provide for private care, and a lack of quality public services within their reach. This situation has resulted in an increased burden of care to women.

Consequently, although women have entered the world of work, one of the main barriers hindering their participation in the workforce has not been eliminated, the responsibility that is assigned exclusively to women in terms of household and care responsibilities. Public policies on co-responsibility can play a great role in providing support to working women and men for the reconciliation of family and work responsibilities. Labour market and productive employment policies with a gender perspective are needed to meet women's needs and eliminate discrimination so that they can fully exercise their economic rights.



From a social and gender approach, the key elements to ensuring the full enjoyment of economic rights of women and men in all their diversity include:

- ✓ Further focus on social policy and redistribution of income and other resources, as a tool to combat inequality and exclusion, based on gender or other reasons such as ethnicity, socio-economic status or other factors;
- ✓ Women's participation, leadership and advocacy in the democratic processes and institutions of their countries, in conditions of equality and non-discrimination;
- ✓ The promotion of bi-directional parity. First, to achieve parity in all state institutions and not only in candidacies for elected office and, secondly, to implement parity from a holistic approach, beyond the incorporation of a set percentage of women and the use of alternation mechanisms;
- ✓ Equal access to employment opportunities in conditions of equality;
- ✓ Regulating the informal economy, building public infrastructure for care and eliminating the wage gap, as well as adopting new approaches to job creation to allow women to participate in the labour market on an equal footing and with the ability to reconcile their work and family lives;
- ✓ Focusing on data generation and other forms of evidence on gender inequalities, the use of indicators based on a human rights, gender and an inter-sectional approach to effectively measure the impact of our efforts and strengthen accountability systems and mechanisms on the implementation of commitments. This will lead to a holistic approach to different realities, such as the case of women with disabilities, indigenous women, LGTBI women, women of African descent, migrants, etc. In this context, an inter-sectional approach is fundamental to ensuring women's rights, especially taking into account the interrelation between gender and social class, ethnicity, age, physical ability, and many other factors that affect the ability of women to exercise their rights. The inter-section of multiple oppressions may exacerbate discrimination against women, generating only oppressive experiences, and undermining differential access to resources. This may prompt women to lose their power at various levels of domination. Therefore, analyzing women's employment, public safety, violence, health, etc., including further economic aspects in women's lives from an inter-sectoral perspective will enable addressing the situation of women from a holistic approach to adopt more effective policies.

Promoting the full enjoyment of women's economic rights and gender equality will contribute to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, in particular, to achieving Goals # 5 **"Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls"** and # 8 **"Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all."** It will also contribute to building more just, dynamic and economically-developed societies. Inclusive economies tend to promote growth and generate benefits for everyone. It is States' responsibility to ensure equality and autonomy in the exercise of the economic rights of women, as established by the IAP, as well as other international instruments. Putting these principles into practice will allow us to shorten the path to gender equality for the benefit of the entire region.

