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Moving from Formal to Substantive Equality
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Progress and Challenges in the Gender Equality Agenda in the Americas

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The gender equality agenda, which started 35 years ago with CEDAW and its announced purpose of eradicating all forms of discrimination against women, is here to stay.

There has been difficult, yet fruitful, progress since this wonderful instrument was ratified by States parties in 1982. Worthy of note is the scope of Article 2, which provides for the duty by all States parties to embody the principle of the equality of men and women and of non-discrimination in their national constitutions and in their civil, criminal, and administrative legislation, as well as to guarantee these principles by establishing legal protection and complaint mechanisms and including them in the operation of all public powers.

Thanks to the above, mechanisms have been developed for the equality and advancement of women, together with legislation to promote and ensure their rights and their access to power and decision-making positions.

The years over which women advanced coincide with a lengthy political transition period, and with the longest democratic succession period in history. This was also the time of structural reforms for a new economic growth model, the results of which have made our region the most violent and unequal in the world.

Our growing participation in public powers, governments, and parliaments (around 27%) is undoubtedly a major step forward, but it falls short of reaching the 30% critical mass.

In the area of economics, women also account for 52% of jobs in the region, and they are the principal income earners for over 50% of households.

The agenda remains pending, however.

1. There are no clear policies on sexual and reproductive rights. According to PAHO/WHO, more than 23,000 women die each year due to complications during pregnancy or childbirth; the teenage pregnancy rate has exceeded that for the African region (73.1 per 100,000 teenagers aged 15-19, compared to 54 per 100,000 in Africa).
2. There is still inequality in terms of jobs and wages, with the salary gap being 20% on average. Additionally, most employed women perform remunerated household chores or work for cleaning and personal services.

3. Double shifts and a lack of time are the hidden costs they pay to access employment, as they perform 70% on average of non-remunerated work at home, in addition to contributing the equivalent of between 5% and 3.5% of GDP in the health sector, given the fact that they care for the sick, the elderly, and their dependents.
4. Access to land ownership is still limited, and there is high inequality in the rural sector, since even though they account for 60-80% of the work, they only own 5% of the land.
5. Political participation through quotas is still resisted and carried out of through cunning arguments and political harassment. Though accounting for 51% of membership in political parties (IDEA and IDB), women only hold 19% of elective positions. And in unions, they account for 90% of members in many cases, but hold only 10% of positions in committees and 3% in national organization departments.
6. Regarding the right to live free from violence, access to justice is also a pending assignment, while insecurity grows, affecting the lives and the integrity of women in poor and deprived areas where mistreatment, rape, and femicide abound.

These are the challenges for women parliamentarians in the region.