



Central American Meeting on Gender Equality, Violence and Education

Transformation Strategies

Final Declaration

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Campana
Latinoamericana
por el Derecho
a la Educacion



The **Central American Meeting on Gender Equality, Violence and Education: Transformation Strategies** was promoted by the Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education (CLADE, by its Spanish acronym) in partnership with UNICEF. Red Salvadoreña por el Derecho a la Educación (RESALDE) hosted this event in El Salvador. This final declaration is the result of debates, reflections and recommendations made during this meeting, based on participants' contributions¹ and we hope this may contribute to public debate and the creation and implementation of legal frameworks and public policies in Latin America and the Caribbean, particularly in Central America.

1. Identifying the challenges faced in the region

During the last 40 years, at regional and international level, there has been significant progress, in the regulatory field, of the UN Universal System of Protection of Human Rights and the Inter-American System, in terms of gender equality, overcoming gender discrimination and violence and their relationship with the right to education. The work of the CEDAW Committee, the Commission on the Status of Women, UNESCO, UNICEF, UN Women, UNGEI, UNDP, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, ECLAC, the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM, by its Spanish acronym), IACHR², has been remarkable. Throughout that journey, the role of feminist and women's networks and movements has been key to consolidate international, regional and national regulatory frameworks, to define the problem in the public agenda and to promote a process of growing awareness among citizens.

These norms have backed some of the achievements in terms of the development of policies and national and regional plans in the field of the right to education and also of gender equality, in an intersectoral way in some cases. For example, the Central American Integration System, in 2013, approved a Regional Policy on Gender Equality and Equity that has a strategic pillar, number 2, on Education for Equality, and goal number 4 of the Central American Education Policy (2013-2030) also deals with gender equality. Likewise, the Division for Gender Affairs of ECLAC, particularly through the resolutions of the Regional Conference on Women and Strategy in Montevideo, has promoted widespread reflection and has achieved progress in significant agreements and recommendations. It is worth mentioning that regulatory developments rooted a conceptual understanding that not only must guide the orientation of public policy but has also enabled an accurate categorization of crimes and violation of rights, laying the foundation for mechanisms of denunciation, remediation and justiciability.

¹ This meeting had the participation of representatives from the following organizations: CLADE; UNICEF; United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI/UN); Ministry of Education of Guatemala; Ministry of Public Education of Costa Rica; Ministry of Education of El Salvador; Coordinación Educativa y Cultural Centroamericana (CECC/SICA); Gloria Oqueli, member of the Central American Parliament (PARLACEN by its Spanish acronym) representing Honduras; Blanca Flor Bonilla and Heidy Carolina Mira Saravia, members of PARLACEN representing El Salvador; Global Campaign for Education (GCE); Latin American and the Caribbean Committee for the Defense of Women's Right (CLADEM, by its Spanish acronym); Agenda Ciudadana por la Educación (ACED) Costa Rica; Foro de Educación y Desarrollo Humano de la Iniciativa por Nicaragua (FEDH-IPN); Dakar Forum Honduras; Colectivo de Educación para Todas y Todos de Guatemala; Foro Socioeducativo de República Dominicana; Reunification of Education for All (REPT, by its Spanish acronym) of Haiti; Red Salvadoreña por el Derecho a la Educación (RESALDE); OXFAM; Plan International; Educo; ASAFOCAIS; Servicio Social Pasionista (SSPAS); FUSALMO; Norwegian Council for Refugees (NCR); Fe y Alegría; CIDEP; RCEP; Fundación de Apoyo Familiar (FUNDAFAM); ActionAid; FIECA; Organization of American States (OAS); and ARPAS/ALER.

² Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee); Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) of the UN Economic and Social Council; UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); UN Children's Fund (UNICEF); UN Women; UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI); UN Development Program (UNDP); Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNCHR); Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC); Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM, by its Spanish acronym); Inter-American Commission for Human Rights (IACHR).



On the other hand, we are aware that, despite progress, not only have **none of the countries been able to eliminate gender inequality in all aspects of social life, including the field of the right to education**, but there has been an increase in gender violence³. In our societies, gender inequality and violence are still among the main forms of injustice and violation of all human rights. The gap between legal frameworks and effective implementation, the high level of impunity and the lack of access to justice, are aspects that come along with little awareness about available policies and resources, and lack of adequate budgets for effective actions in favor of gender equality. Likewise, patriarchal sociocultural patterns that establish unequal power relations between men and women, represent an obstacle on the road to a more egalitarian future.

Gender inequality and violence is expressed in several ways in education systems, from exclusion and discrimination of girls, adolescents and LGBTI population at schools to pedagogical methods, curriculums and infrastructure that reinforce gender stereotypes and roles, maintaining the *status quo*.

In the current scenario, we are witnessing the expansion of regressive human rights agendas in Latin America and the Caribbean. These agendas are contrary to gender equality, sexual diversity, the right to gender identity, education with a gender approach, secular education and comprehensive sexual education, all human rights acknowledged by the States in our region. These setbacks are materializing through disputes in the legislative field, in education policies and pedagogical materials, as well as in the legal field, jeopardizing the human rights protection achieved during the last decades.

³ ECLAC, Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean (2016): <https://oig.cepal.org/en>



2. Legal frameworks and mechanisms of protection

The fight against all forms of gender discrimination and violence in the field of education is founded on international norms on human rights, established in different instruments⁴, developed and complemented with multilateral political frameworks subscribed by the States of the region, such as the 2030 Education Agenda, the “Prevent with Education” Ministerial Declaration and the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the 2030 Sustainable Development Framework by, among others.

These norms, principles and objectives deriving from human rights instruments have been considered in internal legislation, in State education policies, as well as in the scope of action of the Inter-American Commission of Women, the Inter-American Court and Commission of Human Rights, the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESCECVI, by its Spanish acronym) as well as in the general recommendations and observations of treaty bodies of the United Nations and inter-American system of protection of human rights.

Among the key contents of some of these recommendations⁵, it is worth mentioning: gender violence is reinforced as a form of discrimination that undermines or hinders the enjoyment of rights; gender violence is aggravated by cultural, economic, ideological, technological, political, religious, social and environmental aspects; women suffer multiple and interrelated forms of discrimination; and gender violence takes place in all spheres, including education. Since their birth, women, girls and adolescents suffer multiple forms of gender violence. The process of gender socialization that underrates the female sex and reinforces heteronormality contributes to assuming gender violence as natural.

The following obligations of the States are established: to eliminate, through appropriate means and without delay, gender discrimination and violence against women and girls; to adopt legislation prohibiting all forms of gender violence; to ensure access to education on equal terms as well as changes in sociocultural patterns, elimination of prejudices and practices that prevent women from claiming their right to education; the education system must have a gender and rights-based approach; and three dimensions of the right to education are established: the right to have access to education, the rights in education and the instrumentalization of education for the enjoyment of all human rights through education.

⁴ Mainly: Universal Declaration of Human Rights (articles 2 and 26), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (articles 12 and 13), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (articles 24 and 25), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (articles 2, 5, 10) and its Optional Protocol (art. 10), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (articles 28 and 29), the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women “Convention of Belém Do Pará” (article 8) and the Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights in the Area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (San Salvador Protocol).

⁵ CEDAW Committee General Recommendations N° 19, 24, 33, 35 y 36.



3. Considerations

The promotion of the rights of women, girls and adolescents is related to the promotion of a decent life, to the possibility of choosing a personal life project with limitless opportunities of being and acting in the world.

Violence against girls and women, as well as on account of sexual orientation and gender identity in education, associated with the persistence of cultural constructs based on patriarchy and heteronormativity, are serious injustices and violations of human rights. Violence is systemic, it has multiple causes and requires comprehensive solutions. Physical, sociocultural and economic, cognitive and institutional violence are interconnected and mutually reinforced.

The States are responsible for respecting, protecting, promoting and realizing the human rights of girls and women. Violence against girls and women constitutes a violation of the right to a life free from violence on account of gender, therefore, it is legally enforceable. Full participation, on equal terms, in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life must be a priority goal in a government by law

Education is a universal right that is essential to overcome violence and to lead a decent life. It is of paramount importance that the transformative potential of schools be considered towards more just and egalitarian societies. A privileged space to re-learn gender relations, deconstructing patriarchal patterns and reaffirming norms, roles and gender relations on equal terms, for transformation, for the promotion of a culture of peace, democracy and respectful coexistence, to learn how to solve conflicts non-violently, to put in practice critical thinking and multiple freedoms. In this respect, contents related to comprehensive sexual education are highly relevant and this education must address issues and promote reflections on sexual and reproductive rights, sexual health, sexual orientation and gender identity as well as on autonomy and freedom, helping to eliminate control on the corporeality of girls and women in all areas of life.

Civil society participation is key to determine and implement laws, plans and policies with a view to overcome all aspects of gender violence, including in the sphere of educational. This includes not only organized civil society but, rather, the pedagogical and political dialogue with education communities, teachers, parents, young people and adolescents, and also small children.

Media plays a key role in the legitimization of models which are frequently patriarchal, exclusionary and violent, and, thus, further contribute to inequality and gender violence. On the other hand, the potential it has of raising awareness, social transformation and the promotion of diversity and justice has to be considered.



4. Keys for change and transformation

Legal, political and institutional frameworks

- **International, regional and national frameworks of human rights constitute an agreed set of norms** that has to be the foundation to develop public policies on gender equality and to overcome violence in and from education and beyond, through intersectoral approaches. States in our region have to resist any kind of setback in the agreed concepts and recommendations, placing emphasis on the General Recommendations of CEDAW Committee N° 35 and 36, the Convention of Belém do Pará and Sustainable Developments Goals 4, 5 and 16.
- **National plans, policies and legislations must harmonize with international and regional human rights standards in terms of gender equality and the right to education**, through an intersectoral approach, with the purpose of tackling the causes and roots of gender violence and discrimination.
- States are guarantors of rights and responsible for not only ensuring the implementation of public policies **but also securing the availability of public funding for the full realization of the right to education intended to overcome gender inequality and violence at schools and related environments**. Apart from being properly allocated, funds have to be fully and transparently executed. Accountability processes have to be public, predictable and with mechanisms of remediation.
- Themes and resources of **international cooperation have to be in line with national priorities, plans and needs; as well as with sustainable development goals**. Any cooperation has to be based on horizontal relations, even in terms of production of knowledge and learning, and collective materials. Within the framework of international cooperation, it is worth mentioning the importance of promoting a greater production of knowledge, research, disaggregate statistics and baselines, to enable a better understanding and follow-up of problems.
- The Central American Integration System is an important platform for the promotion of policies and programs to promote gender equality and to overcome violence in and from education in the region and a stronger coordination between SE CECC SICA, STM COMMCA, Parlacen and other bodies is recommended for this purpose, including a close approach to civil society organizations and networks. Likewise, it is timely to **strengthen the dialogue between CECC SICA and the Follow-up Committee of CEDAW as well as with the Special Rapporteurships of the United Nations System and the Inter-American System**. It is extremely important to follow-up recommendations n° 35 and 36 of CEDAW to move forward in the transformation that is necessary towards gender equality and to overcome violence in and from education.



Promoting sociocultural patterns in favor of gender equality and to overcome violence

- It is necessary to **increase efforts to raise widespread awareness on gender equality, among citizens in general**, including campaigns and materials in different languages, art and culture strategies, apart from debate and dialogue activities to raise awareness and to overcome discriminations, stereotypes and lack of information issues.
- There is an urgent need to promote the **deconstruction of hegemonic masculinities for the reconstruction of femininity and masculinity models on equal terms**, to eliminate stereotyped, sexist and heteronormative roles as well as the denaturalization of gender violence.
- **We need to spark a critical response towards media** so as to challenge media content and bad practices, through the creation of citizens' observatories and proposing norms so that violations of rights have response and remediation, and, at the same time, to **promote a wider and more plural debate and reflection on gender equality**.

Emancipatory education that guarantees rights

- **Strengthening secular, public, free and quality education** systems represents the main strategy towards gender equality, non-sexist education and to overcome violence in and from education because it leads to higher levels of social equality and addresses the structural causes of the problem.
- **The principle of secularism in public education must be respected and put in practice**, according to the principle of freedom of conscience and the constitutional principle of separation between church and State⁶, avoiding undermining the deliberative and plural nature of schools and the consolidation of democratic societies. Legal and political frameworks as well as practices at schools that are contrary to the principle of secularism, must be reversed. To better understanding its political and ethical meaning, it is important to have further debates and awareness raising processes with the whole education community.
- **Girls, boys, adolescents and young people must be recognized as rights bearers** and agents of transformation and, at the same time, it is essential to strengthen the space for dialogue and decision-making with students, encouraging the active participation of girls and young adolescents in the democratic management of schools.
- Gender equality and overcoming gender violence in and through education are key components that **must be dealt with from early childhood until tertiary education and beyond**, even with an increase of academic researches. Likewise, adolescence represents a particularly important stage that demands special attention from education systems.
- The ICHR has underscored the **importance of comprehensive sexual education in education curriculums**, being the prevention of violence and teenage and adolescent pregnancy an urgent issue for the protection of girls, boys and adolescents.

⁶ At constitutional level, Costa Rica is the only country in Latin America that has an official religion. In the rest of the countries in the region, at normative level, there is a separation between the State and the church



- States that are still in non-compliance, **must pass laws to ban corporal punishment at home and at schools, as well as sexual abuse and harassment**, which would represent a huge progress in the denaturalization of violence against girls and women and in the promotion of gender equality.
- Asegurar una **infraestructura accesible y segura para niñas y adolescentes** es también de importancia fundamental, con baños seguros y asegurando **transportes escolares** que permitan recorridos seguros de ida a la escuela y vuelta a la casa.
- We recall that the **quality of education has to be understood in its transformative and emancipatory potential**, and this implies political pedagogical processes, curriculums and relational practices leading to critical thinking, awareness on social issues, reflection, imagination, the possibility of dissenting and conflict resolution through dialogue, as well as promotion of a non-sexist education that encourages gender equality. Education in terms of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, together with humanities, art, culture and sports, constitute fundamental pillars of a quality education, and public systems in our region should appreciate its value. Likewise, early and continuing education of teachers is absolutely essential to promote an emancipatory education and must be a priority of public policies in the region.