



**PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION**  
**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE DIRECTING COUNCIL**  
SPECIAL SUBCOMMITTEE ON WOMEN, HEALTH, AND DEVELOPMENT



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**INTERAGENCY PREPARATORY ACTIVITIES FOR THE WORLD  
CONFERENCE ON WOMEN**

This document responds to the request made by Member Governments at the 13th Meeting of the Subcommittee on Women, Health, and Development to be kept informed concerning the activities being planned and undertaken in the Region in preparation for the IV United Nations World Conference on Women to be held in Beijing, China, in 1995.

The document describes the background to the preparations being made, identifies the roles envisaged for the national governments and organizations and indicates the steps PAHO is taking to ensure participation of the health sector.

The Committee is asked to comment on the preparations being made and suggest ways in which the health concerns of the Region of the Americas can be fully reflected in both the Regional and the World Conferences.

## 1. Background

A summary of the principal activities that had been carried out in connection with the World Conference on Women to be held in 1995 in Beijing, China, was discussed at the 13th Meeting of the Subcommittee on Women, Health and Development held in April 1993. The report submitted to the subcommittee included suggestions for discussion by the Subcommittee, concerning preparatory activities to be carried out to support the World Conference.

Strategies proposed by the Secretariat for the consideration of the Subcommittee included:

- (a) The importance of conducting epidemiological research to further understand how biological and gender differences between men and women have differential impacts on their respective patterns of health and disease;
- (b) The need to identify problems that arise because of a dearth of gender sensitive health services, including an emphasis on the importance of engaging women fully in decisions pertaining to their physical and mental health;
- (c) Violence against women as a public health emergency necessitating immediate action on the part of the health sector to galvanize an integrated, intersectoral response;
- (d) Health promotion and self-care as a bridge between governmental and non-governmental partnerships designed to empower women and improve their health and quality of life;
- (e) Disseminating the experience gained in gender training and health by PAHO's Regional Program on Women, Health, and Development in Central America and other countries through the proposed study on regional experiences by the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and UNIFEM;
- (f) Suggestions for methodological tools that facilitate gender planning and analysis of the development of health policies, programs and projects;
- (g) Promoting and facilitating the systematic inclusion of NGOs into national and regional commissions that related to the development and advancement of women in the Americas.

The Subcommittee approved the proposed plan of action and recommended keeping the Member Governments and itself informed on developments related to preparatory activities to the World Conference.

## **2. The United Nations World Conference on Women**

Three World Conferences on Women have been held by the United Nations over the past two decades: the first, in Mexico City in 1975, during the International Year of Women, led to the declaration of the UN Women's Decade (1976-1985) with the theme *Equality, Development and Peace*. The second was the Mid-UN Decade Conference held in Copenhagen in 1980. At this meeting the subtheme of Employment, Health and Education was added, and a World Program of Action was accepted calling for national, regional, and international strategies for achieving women's full and equal participation in development, politics, decision-making, international cooperation and peace. The third conference was held in Nairobi, Kenya, at the end of the UN Women's Decade in 1985. This Conference reviewed and appraised the achievements of the Decade for Women, identified obstacles to women's development and adopted the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000.

The IV UN World Conference will review and appraise the advancement of women since 1985 in the light of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies and adopt a platform for action focusing on removing obstacles to the advancement of women. Some of the issues that will be taken up are: awareness-building, decision-making, literacy, poverty, health, violence, and technology.

The World Conference on Women is an official United Nations meeting of government and intergovernmental agencies and is being planned by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. Participation is generally restricted to government delegations, representatives of United Nations agencies, official observers, and representatives of NGOs in consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC). As a result of a resolution passed by the Commission on the Status of Women in its March 1993 meeting in Vienna, some selected NGOs without such status will also be invited to attend next year's Beijing Conference. The Commission is drawing up criteria for selecting NGOs from among those which participate in UN preparatory activities and/or regional meetings.

### **2.1 Regional Organization**

The Regional Plan of Action for the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean was adopted by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in June 1977 at its first regional conference on this topic. This Regional Plan of Action mandates that "the

secretariat of CEPAL will consult with the United Nations specialized agencies which have programs on women's integration in development."

Since September 1992, the ECLAC Secretariat has convened three inter-institutional meetings of the United Nations specialized agencies and programs on future activities to promote the integration of women into Latin American and Caribbean development, in preparation for the 1995 World Conference of Women. The third meeting was held in Santiago, Chile, in December 1993.

**3. Second Meeting of Specialized Agencies and Other Bodies of the United Nations System, 26 May 1993**

Representatives of the following specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system participated: United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), International Labor Organization (ILO), Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the United Nations International Drug Control Program.

At the Second Meeting, PAHO reported that following the First Meeting in September 1992, PAHO's Regional Program for Women, Health and Development had reported to the PAHO Governing Bodies on the inter-agency agreements adopted to support activities to prepare for the Regional Conference and the World Conference, and made recommendations with respect to the contributions of Member Governments that PAHO might facilitate. PAHO's Governing Bodies recommended that the Regional Program carry out the proposed plan of work, in coordination with ECLAC, and that it provide support to the countries.

PAHO also reported that it would collaborate with ECLAC in preparing the chapter of the diagnostic analysis concerning the health of women for presentation by the Secretariat to the Regional Conference in Buenos Aires in September 1994, formulating proposals in that regard.

The participants at the Second Meeting arrived at the following agreements:

**3.1 *National Agreements***

- To request the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system to grant priority to national-level activities to achieve the objectives of the 1995 World Conference;

- To call on governments to establish, as soon as possible, national commissions composed of State institutions, nongovernmental organizations, academic centers and grassroots organizations that carry out activities or programs for the advancement of women, and other bodies whose inclusion in the commissions would be deemed useful, to oversee all technical and organizational aspects of the preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women. Also, to recommend that the national commissions establish their own organizations in order to ensure that activities to prepare for the Regional Conference and the World Conference are carried out. Among other activities, plans should include forums, workshops, seminars and conventions to sensitize and mobilize society, particularly the mass media, with regard to women's issues, with special attention to the situation of women refugees. All these activities should reflect the cultural diversity of the Region and the needs of the whole population, including different ethnic groups, minorities, refugees and displaced persons;
- To provide support, through technical and financial assistance, to the national commissions, to enable them to fulfill their functions in respect to the 1995 World Conference and the 1994 Regional Conference in a satisfactory manner;
- To suggest that inter-agency groups of international organizations be created in the countries to support the national commissions and that each such group designate a person to coordinate activities;
- To recommend that a key output of national-level activities, conceived as part of a project to strengthen the protagonistic role of women, be national reports based on compiled data and on a wide-ranging discussion of relevant issues, technical seminars, campaigns, national meetings and forums.

### 3.2 *Subregional Activities*

There were three agreements, of which one is particularly relevant to the Subcommittee and the Secretariat, to ensure that, as a minimum, one inter-agency meeting is held to promote the World Conference in each subregion, at least in the Caribbean, Central American and the Andean subregions. The agenda for each meeting would be determined after analyzing the proposals received and the activity schedules, which, pursuant to a decision of the First Meeting of Specialized Agencies, should related to the following issues: gender equity, sustainable development, and consolidation of democracy. Also, concrete topics should be related to the priority issues established by the mandates for the World Conference and the Regional Conference.

#### **4. Activities Subsequent to the Second Meeting of Specialized Agencies**

PAHO has actively participated in the Interagency Task Force on Gender and Development initiated in Costa Rica under the auspices of the UNDP. This Task Force is directing its efforts to facilitating and strengthening the contribution that NGOs and other civil sector organizations can make to the national and subregional processes currently underway in preparation for the VI Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean being organized by ECLAC in Buenos Aires in September, 1994. This Regional Conference will also serve to prepare the World Conference in 1995.

The need to have a subregional Preparatory Consultation that draws upon NGOs is based on the specific political, economic and social dynamics that have characterized Central America, namely, the recent conflict and emerging peace and democratization processes currently being undertaken in some of the countries. These factors were thought to warrant a subregional consultation process that would seek to contribute to the strengthening of a pluralistic society that respects human rights of men and women and recognizes the imperative of including Central American women in these development processes.

Thus, the Preparatory Consultation will review past contributions made by women during the years of conflict as well as during the peace process, seeking to formulate proposals that delineate how Central American women visualize their continued contributions to the future of this subregion.

PAHO has been present throughout the development of these Preparatory Consultation steps in this subregion. UNDP was selected by the members of the Interagency Task Force, including PAHO, to coordinate and organize the Consultation. As a first step, the UNDP representative visited all countries in Central America last November, meeting with multilateral and bilateral organizations, governmental and non-governmental organizations. The visits had two objectives: (1) to request agencies to consider the formation of an interagency committee at the country level that would coordinate preparatory efforts for the Consultation, (2) to request governments to include NGOs in the official delegations to the Consultation.

#### **5. Third Meeting of Specialized Agencies and Other Bodies of the United Nations System, 13 December 1993**

Representatives of the following specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations systems participated: United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR),

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), International Labor Organization (ILO), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations International Institute for Research and Training for Women (INSTRAW), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Inter-American Commission of Women of the Organization of American States (CIM/OAS), the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture (IICA), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

At this third meeting, a draft of the Regional Plan of Action on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean, 1995-2001, was reviewed. Preparatory activities for the Regional Conference and the World Conference were also discussed.

Participants agreed that the draft document presented by ECLAC could constitute the Regional contribution to the World Summit on Social Development in 1995. However, suggestions were made concerning aspects to be further emphasized within the document:

- (a) The effect of structural adjustment on women during the decade of the 1980s;
- (b) The concept of gender within the context of democratization;
- (c) Negative and positive aspects of the current processes of economic transition being undertaken in countries of the Region;
- (d) Social and gender equity as essential components of development.

The draft Plan of Action contains six strategies. The second of these includes four strategic objectives for women's health:

- Promote an integrated life-cycle approach to health care for women based on equity;
- Promote the establishment of preventive health programs that strengthen decentralization processes and foster the full participation of men and women in the design and execution of these programs, thus ensuring quality care;
- Promote research to shed light on the health care need of women, especially in the area of women's reproductive health, early pregnancy, data on fertility by area of residence as well as levels of education and income; abortion and its relation to maternal mortality; research on specific

diseases and illnesses that affect women; and studies focusing on the health of girls and elderly women;

- Promote initiatives that ensure the reproductive rights of women.

With regard to the preparations for the Regional Conference in Buenos Aires, many participants voiced concern that not enough was being done to assist countries in the preparation for the Buenos Aires meeting, which is six months away. In this regard, ECLAC reiterated the coordinating role of the UNDP at the country level, and it was agreed that UNDP Resident Representatives should be requested to designate someone within each one of their respective offices to provide technical assistance to governments in their elaboration of their national reports.

## **6. Conclusions and Recommendations**

PAHO's Regional Program for Women, Health, and Development is preparing a chapter on "The Health of Women during the Decade, 1980-1990: Advances and New Perspectives," which will be included as one of ten chapters in the document *Women in Latin America and the Caribbean: An Analysis of the Current Situation in the 1990's and Towards the Year 2000*. This document will be completed in May 1994, and will be presented at the Regional Conference in Buenos Aires in September 1994.

In February 1994, PAHO's Regional Program for Women, Health and Development scheduled a meeting in Quito, Ecuador with all its WHD focal points working in PAHO Representations in South and Central America. Another meeting is being planned for June 1994 in the English-speaking Caribbean, during which the role of the different focal points in the preparatory work to the Regional and World Conferences will be discussed, and plans of action will be devised with a view to better assisting Ministries of Health in their formulation of inputs from the health sector for their national reports. At the time of preparation of this document for the Subcommittee, this meeting had not yet been held. Subcommittee members will be informed concerning the results of the discussion in Quito at the Subcommittee meeting in April.

Given the general concern that not enough time and human resources are being made available to coordinate country level efforts for the preparatory processes, ECLAC has forwarded to UNDP the results of the Third Meeting of Specialized Agencies and Other Bodies of the United Nations System, accompanied by a letter expressing this concern. In this letter, a request has been made to UNDP to appoint a full-time staff member or consultant to support the national process. In addition, a letter to the national chanceries has been sent from ECLAC soliciting the establishment of national committees. In the case where responses are not forthcoming to this request, joint



missions comprised of ECLAC and other specialized agencies will travel to these countries to further intercede for the establishment of these committees.

It will be important for PAHO and Ministries of Health to keep abreast of the developments of these national committees, ensuring that the health sector is well represented when these are formed. PAHO's Regional Program for Women, Health and Development has urged its national focal points to proactively seek information and involvement in all aspects of the preparatory work, as well as coordinate with UNDP in these efforts.

The Subcommittee members are requested to review the status of development of these national reports within their own countries, and seek ways to ensure the participation of the health sector in their formulation, so that a complete view of the health of women can be provided on behalf of their respective countries.