OEA/Ser.W

CIDI/INF. 454/21 rev.1

21 September 2021

Original: English

CONCEPT NOTE

Regular meeting of THE

Inter-American Council for Integral Development (CIDI)

28 September 2021

(Prepared by the Executive Secretariat for Integral Development)

THEME: **SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP TO PROMOTE THE INCLUSION OF WOMEN, GIRLS AND POPULATIONS IN VULNERABLE SITUATIONS**

1. **Background/Justification**

The COVID-19 pandemic has deepened existing inequalities and widened technology and social gaps because of limited access of segments of society to the skills and tools necessary for the digital economy.

According to the Global Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum (WEF),[[1]](#footnote-1)/ the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the estimated time to close the gender gap in the world by 36 years (now up to 135.6 years). The WEF report documents that the pandemic and ensuing economic activity restrictions and losses have impacted women more severely than men. Lower income households and disadvantaged communities have faced more financial, health, learning, social and emotional hardship and uncertainties. Job losses have been particularly pronounced among minorities and working mothers. Across the developing world in particular, women have borne the brunt of the pandemic challenges in a disproportioned percentage.[[2]](#footnote-2)/

Some initial projections from the International Labor Organization (ILO) suggest 5% of all employed women lost their jobs, compared with 3.9% of employed men. Furthermore, the overreliance on women to “double-shift” with duties to care for children increased job insecurity and complicated maintaining work-life balance.

In the dimension of economic participation and opportunity, the WEF Report highlights that there is also a persistent gender gap in leadership roles, with women representing just 27% of all managerial level positions. Per LinkedIn data, due to the pandemic, there is a reversal of 1 to 2 years of progress of women’s hiring into leadership roles across multiple industries.[[3]](#footnote-3)/

The acceleration of the digital economy and e-commerce reinforced the need to develop skills and training in the innovation-driven sectors and technologies. These sectors have the potential to create opportunities aligned with the jobs of the future and to contribute to greater economic autonomy, especially for women. Access to abilities related to transformative technologies thus can become important means to ensure that women, women-led businesses and populations under vulnerable situations are not excluded from the expanding opportunities of the digital economy post-COVID.

A significant percentage of women (51.8%) are currently employed in less skilled, low productivity sectors such as care, education, health, social assistance, domestic employment, traditional commerce, light manufacturing, rural agriculture, which may be more vulnerable to rapid changes in technology. Although women in the region have higher rates of enrollment in tertiary education, they only account for about 34.5% of graduates in STEM.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Likewise, women are currently underrepresented in sectors related to transformative technologies and skills associated to those fields. In Cloud Computing, women make up 14% of the workforce; in Engineering, 20%; and in Data and AI, 32%. Women also experience a bigger gender gap when pursuing job transitions in these fields. In Cloud Computing the job-switching difference is 58%; in Engineering the gap is 42%; and for Product Development the gap stands at 19%.[[5]](#footnote-5)/

Advancing concrete, actionable initiatives to improve access and leadership of women and communities with limited opportunities to follow STEM education, science and innovation careers are needed to address some of the existing workforce inequalities affecting economic mobility and gender equality in fields of Science and Technology in the Americas

Within the context of the Inter-American Committee on Science and Technology (COMCYT), OAS member states have identified the importance of pursuing deliberate policies and programs to address existing gaps and inequalities affecting part of the population and communities.

1. **Purpose of the Meeting**

This CIDI meeting will offer member states the opportunity to discuss actionable priorities to advance regional collaboration to address the gender and inclusion gaps on innovation, science, technology and entrepreneurship in the Americas.

The session will look at initiatives which can provide for specific actions to increase awareness, support the design of policies and undertake programs and results-driven interventions to improve access to science, innovation and technology to improve the economic and social situation of women and populations in vulnerable situations.

Presentations from expert guest speakers will feature initiatives focused on women economic leadership and empowerment (access, skills, policy advancement, pragmatic approaches) to leverage science, innovation and technology for development and inclusion.

Member states will share good practices, concrete programs to advance women’s and vulnerable population’s empowerment and opportunities in STEM education, entrepreneurial and science-tech-innovation driven economic opportunities, identify gaps and needs in these areas and share offers of collaboration to improve regional outcomes.

**3. Relevance to the Executive Secretariat for Integral Development (SEDI) and OAS Mandates**

The Inter-American Committee on Science and Technology (COMCYT) agreed on the main theme of the VI REMCYT (CIDI/COMCYT/doc.3/19.rev.1), “Harnessing the Power of Transformative Science and Technologies to Drive our Communities Forward”. One of the subthemes for the VI REMCYT to be held on December 7, 2021, is “Science, Technology, Innovation and Entrepreneurship to promote the inclusion of women and girls and other populations in vulnerable situations” which is the area of focus for this CIDI Meeting.

“Promoting inclusive and competitive economies” is one of the strategic lines for Integral Development in the OAS Comprehensive Strategic Plan (AG/RES.1 (LI-E/16). One of its Strategic Objectives (1.3) is to: “Increase cooperation for strengthening member States institutional capacities onincorporating innovation and transformative technology to create added value and diversification in their economies in a sustainable and inclusive fashion.”

The resolution "Advancing Hemispheric Initiatives on Integral Development" [AG/RES.2916 (XLVIII-O/18)] instructs member states to: “Endorse the Declaration of Medellín, Science, Technology, and Innovation as Pillars of Transformation in the Americas" (CIDI/REMCYT-V/DEC.1/17 rev.1), adopted at the V REMCYT, held in Medellin, Colombia on November 2-3, 2017. The “Declaration of Medellin” highlights that “development cooperation is crucial in promoting equitable and inclusive innovation and the foresight for new technologies in industry, agriculture, communications, education, health, the environment, energy, transport, and other sectors, and that it is therefore a priority to promote mechanisms to enable science, technology, and innovation to contribute to social and economic development.”

Furthermore, Ministers in Medellin also agreed to “promote the inclusion of women and girls, and other populations in vulnerable situation[[6]](#footnote-6)/, in the areas of science, technology, and innovation to enhance their opportunities for learning, developing early vocations for science, technology, and innovation, and engagement in civic and political life; and to promote their insertion in the labor market, their access to positions of leadership and decision-making, and their participation in social transformation processes brought about by scientific and technological advancement.”

1. **Structure of the Meeting**

Experts will be invited as guest speakers to discuss the main challenges and opportunities to close the gender and inclusion gaps on science, technology, innovation and entrepreneurship in the Americas. Member states will have the opportunity to ask questions to the invited experts on their presentations and/or main points covered during their interventions as part an interactive dialogue guided by the Chair of CIDI.

Once the question and answer session concludes, delegations will be invited to share good practices, specific offers of collaboration or needs related to this topic, including from capital, when available. The key guiding questions for these interventions by member states are:

1) What are the key challenges for your country to close the gender and inclusion gaps?

2) What specific good practices or approaches that your country has successfully implemented to advance the participation and leadership of women, minorities or underserved population in STEM education and careers?

3) What offers of cooperation or partnerships can your country bring to the table for regional cooperation in this area?

4) What can/should be done within the context of the OAS-SEDI to close the gender divide in science, technology and innovation?

Expert Presentations (7 Minutes/Max 10 minutes)

* Shelli Brunswick, Chief Operating Officer, Space Foundation, United States
* Saiph Savage, Assistant Professor and Director of the Civic A.I. Lab, Northeastern University-Khoury College of Computer Sciences, Boston Mass., and Co-Director of the UNAM Civic Innovation Lab in Mexico
* Vanise Zimmer, Founder and President, ElasBank, Brazil

1. **Outcome of the Meeting**

It is expected that the session will contribute to:

1. Providing information on main trends, challenges and specific opportunities for OAS member states to improve access and leadership of women and populations in vulnerable situations in science, innovation, technology and entrepreneurial endeavors;
2. Identifying priorities and areas of regional cooperation in the Americas to address the gender and inclusion gaps on innovation, science, technology and entrepreneurship in the Americas.
3. Encouraging member states to present good practices and concrete policies and programs with positive results to reduce the technology and gender gaps deepened by the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. Advancing specific curriculum and experiential learning opportunities for girls, women, and underserved population in the “Americas Youth Academy on Transformative Technologies.”

CIDRP03326E01

1. . The *Global Gender Gap Index* of the WEF provides a global ranking of countries and a framework of four dimensions (Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment) to assess the magnitude of global, regional and national gender-based disparities. Available at: <http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. . McKinsey Global Institute, March 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. . WEF Global Gender Gap Index(2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. . UN ECLAC, Social Panorama of Latin America 2018 (Feb. 2019), available at <https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/44396/4/S1900050_en.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. . <http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. . Footnote from V REMCYT’s Medellin Declaration: “The concept of vulnerability applies to those population sectors or groups which, by reason of age, gender, civil status, and/or ethnic origin, are at risk, which prevents them from participating in development and accessing better conditions of well-being. (United Nations Commission on Human Rights).” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)