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**REPORT ON THE INITIATIVE FOR DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION
(IDEA) WOMEN'S SEMINAR**

Steve Stewart, CoDevelopment Canada
April 16 and 20, 2001
Québec City, Québec

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Canada

Report on the Initiative for Democratic Education (IDEA) Women's Seminar Quebec City

April 16 and 20, 2001

Format:

The Seminar was divided into two parts that took place just prior to, and following the Peoples' Summit of the Americas Education Forum. This format enabled participants in the IDEA Seminar to also attend both the Education Forum and the Peoples' Summit Women's Forum.

The first session involved representatives from Educators Association Women's secretariats from Mexico, Central America, the Andes, the Caribbean, and the Southern Cone of South America, and representatives of Canadian Teachers organizations.

The Second (April 20) session was incorporated into a broader meeting of organizations participating in the IDEA process. This meeting involved male and female representatives from 36 educators, student, women's, community and native organizations from 18 American Countries. The morning focussed general discussion of the work of the IDEA process while the afternoon was dedicated to the presentation and discussion of the conclusions and proposals of the April 16 Women in Education session.

Attending April 16 session: *Christine Stewart Aboriginal Women's Representative – BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF), Julia McCrae – Surrey Teachers Association, Susie Ma – Vancouver Elementary School Teachers Association, Jinny Sims – Vice President – BCTF, Greer Kaiser – BCTF, Marie José Caron – Women's Commission, Central des Syndicats du Québec, Linda Shuto – Director, CoDevelopment Canada, Aracely Moreno, President – National Union of Educators, Ecuador (UNE), Jane Goyes, Women's Secretary – UNE and IDEA Women's Network Coordinator, Leticia Sánchez Farfán – Mexican Section, Trinational Coalition to Defend Public Education, Ana Maria Grajeda – Section IX – National Union of Education Workers, Mexico, Carolina Abrales Sfeir – Confederation of Education Workers of the Republic of Argentina, Virginia Albert, Women's Secretary – Caribbean Union of Teachers, Nubia Turcios de Díaz – Women's Secretary, Federation of Central American Teachers Organizations.*

A total of 14 women representing 11 organizations from seven jurisdictions participated in the April 16 session of the IDEA Women's seminar. These same women met on several other occasions during the week to further their work and to prepare the agenda for the April 20 meeting. The women also presented recommendations to the Peoples' Summit Women's Forum held the evening of April 16.

April 16

After introductions, Jane Goyes, Coordinator of the IDEA Women in Education Network reviewed the objectives of the meeting and the Network. The objectives of the Network are:

1. To establish permanent communication and coordination among the women and organizations that participate in the IDEA process.
2. To exchange experiences, knowledge and information that will help us with a general analysis of gender issues in the Americas, and more specifically, in the area of public education.
3. To promote, both within our organizations and beyond, the concerns of the Women's Network.
4. To incorporate the agenda of the Women's Network into the work of the IDEA Process.
5. To promote solidarity among women in education and women's organizations working to better our living conditions
8. To promote a greater awareness of gender issues within our organizations.
9. To work for conditions that make the empowerment of women possible.
10. To develop and carry out training and research projects that will help strengthen women in their identity and in their social, political and union lives.

Regional Reports: Conditions for women and girls in education vary significantly throughout the hemisphere – for example in the Caribbean and Canada, girls are now more strongly represented than boys in secondary and post-secondary education, while in Central America and the Andean region girls are still less likely to complete basic or higher education than boys. All regions expressed concern that, in comparison with their actual numbers in the education workforce, women are under-represented in leadership roles both within the school system and within educators' organizations.

Women in Education Organizations: - Leticia Sánchez Farfán, Mexican representative, IDEA Women in Education Network. Ms. Sánchez presented a brief report about the situation of women in educators' organisations in the Americas. She said however, that a lack of statistics that specifically refer to girls and women in education in each country coupled with difficulties in communication with the organizations made it prevented her from developing a comprehensive report. Participants agreed to name a person responsible for gathering data in each country and developed a revised survey (attached) regarding the situation of girls and women in education and education organizations. They agreed to set October 31, 2001 as the deadline for gathering this information and to lobby educator organisations to collect more data on the role of women and girls in education.

Impact of the FTAA on female educators and students: Since the actual contents of the draft of the FTAA agreement were not yet available, much of the discussion centred on speculation of the potential impact based on existing trade agreements in the Americas and related neoliberal

education reforms. Canadian and Mexican participants spoke of the impact of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on public education and women as examples of what could be expected from the FTAA. Restriction of access to education based on pass/fail standardized exams was an important development that Canadian and Mexican women educators identified as a spin-off of NAFTA. In Mexico the standardized exams (CENEVAL) face a legal challenge from women's organizations on the grounds that they tend to favour male skills over female-identified ones, thereby reducing the number of girls who can move on to the next level of education.

The representative from Argentina provided other examples from her country's experience with the Mercosur. Participants were concerned that the agreement could lead to a worsening of working conditions for educators, greater privatization of the public education system and a related decline of the participation of girls in school as user's fees are introduced and parents with limited resources opt to withdraw their female children from school.

Delegates also expressed concern that the trade-related shift in education systems to job-training and international competitiveness could weaken national control over curricula and weaken the promotion of social values in education, including new values that strive to increase gender equality.

Planning for the IDEA Women in Education Conference: At its founding meeting in Quito, Ecuador in May, 2000 the IDEA Women in Education Network proposed to organize a Hemispheric Conference for women in Education. Participants took advantage of the seminar in Quebec to make concrete plans for this conference.

The conference, to be entitled "Women, Globalization and Public Education," will be held October 31 and November 1, 2001 in Morelia, Mexico. The conference will include female educators and students and will consist of panels and working groups on the following themes:

a) The impact of globalization on:

- i) the education of women and girls;
- ii) working and living conditions for female teachers and the teaching career;
- iii) Social security and educators pensions
- iv) Privatizing tendencies in education systems including financing, decentralization and municipalization and social participation.

b) Gender, empowerment and citizenship.

- i) The new roles of men and women in society and the school
- ii) The promotion of the rights of women and girls in our schools and in our organizations
- iii) Empowerment as a teaching method
- iv) The promotion and diffusion of advances in the rights of women and girls.

In addition there will be an opportunity for participants to meet in regional sub-groups (North America, Central America, the Caribbean, the Andes and the Southern Cone) to work on the formation and strengthening of regional networks of women in education linked to the Hemispheric IDEA network.

April 20 Session:

This session was attended by 49 delegates representing 35 civil society organizations from 18 American countries (see attached list). The IDEA Women in Education Network Coordinating Committee presented for discussion the recommendations of the April 16 session.

Communications: It was agreed that communications between women's representatives in each organization and between the Women's Network Coordinating Committee and the IDEA process Coordinating Committee (Red SEPA) needed to be strengthened. Each organization will select a liaison to coordinate communications with the IDEA Women's Network. The liaison will also be responsible for gathering the data for the Women's network education survey. A women's network representative will be also be added to the Red SEPA Coordinating Committee.

The Women, Globalization and Public Education Conference: There was much discussion about whether the conference should focus on gender issues and include both men and women or should be specifically for female educators and students. There was also debate about the breadth of the conference: whether it should focus on the impact of trade agreements on women in general or focus more on the situation of women in education systems and the impact of new reforms, policies and trade rules on their condition.

In the end, a narrower focus was agreed upon and the conference will be specifically for women educators and students. In the interests of facilitating communication between the Women in Education Network and the IDEA Coordinating committee, it was agreed that a Coordinating Committee Meeting would be held in Morelia on October 29 and that both male and female members of the committee would subsequently attend the Women, Globalization and Education conference.

The Red SEPA will seek to finance one conference delegate from each country participating in the IDEA process. Other organizations may send delegates if they cover their own travel and conference expenses. Organizations can send more than one delegate under the same conditions, but decision-making will be by organization, not by individual delegates.

Concerns were raised by delegates that there was no point in organizing a hemispheric conference if there are no regional infrastructures that will facilitate follow-up work. It was agreed to hold a series of regional women's network meetings prior to the Morelia conference. The objectives of these meetings are to prepare information and proposals to bring to the hemispheric gathering and to create regional women in education networks. Expenses for the regional meetings will be covered by participating organizations and to reduce costs will be "piggy-backed" on already planned regional educators or students' conferences wherever possible. The first of these will be the Andean region meeting that will meet in Guayaquil, Ecuador June 18 and 19. The meeting will involve female students and educators from Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela.

Adjournment: Although the meeting was scheduled to continue until 4:30 PM, it was adjourned at 3:30 because the CSQ announced they would have to close their offices early due to escalating conflicts between police and demonstrators on the streets outside.

Appendix 1: **IDEA Women in Education Network Seminar B Delegates**

April 16 Session (Note: All the delegates to the April 16 session, except Marie Josée Caron of the CSQ, also participated in the second session April 20)

Name and position	Organization	e-mail or fax	Address and telephone
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April 20 Session

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50 delegates	36 organizations		18 countries

IDEA Women in Education Seminar

Agenda

CSQ Building – 320 Rue St. Joseph, Est, Quebec City, Quebec

9:00 to 3:30 April 16, 2001

9:00 – Introductions

9:30 – Objectives of the IDEA Women’s Network and approval of Agenda – Jane Goyes – Union National de Educadores de Ecuador

10:00 – Regional Women’s Network Reports – Caribbean, Canada, Mexico, Central America, the Andes, Southern Cone of South America

11:00 – The Situation of women in education organizations in the Americas – Leticia Sánchez Farfán – Mexican Section of the Trinational Coalition to Defend Public Education.

12:00 – Impact of the FTAA on female educators, parents and students – Round table

1:00 – Lunch

1:45 – Planning for the Hemispheric IDEA Women in Education Conference

- Setting the agenda
- Themes to consider
- Organizations to invite
- Date and place of Continental Conference

3:30 – Meeting Adjourns

Seminar sponsored by CoDevelopment Canada and the John Holmes Fund of the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development

Civil Society Network for Public Education in the Americas B IDEA

General Meeting

Room: 103, CSQ Building, 320 Rue St. Joseph Est, Quebec City, Quebec

9:00 – 14:45, Friday, April 20, 2001

Agenda

11:00 – Introductions

11:30 – Report from the Red SEPA Coordinating Committee on the activities and research carried out by the Network since the Quito Hemispheric IDEA Conference.

12:00 – Evaluation and discussion of the work of the Red SEPA

12:45 – Report of the IDEA Women in Education Network and discussion of the themes and agenda for the Red SEPA Continental Conference of Women in Education planned for the upcoming year.

3:30 – The future of the Red SEPA

- New activities and research to be done by the Network
- How can the network best contribute to the plan of action agreed upon at the Hemispheric Forum on Education of the People's Summit?

4:30 – Meeting Adjourns