



Women's Empowerment in the Interamerican Scout Region

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
What is Women's Empowerment?	5
How can we develop a gender and women's empowerment strategy in our National Scout Organizations?	9

Introduction

Women make important and high-impact contributions to the World Organisation of the Scout Movement. We recognize the efforts that some National Scout Organisations in the Region have made in recent years to ensure the participation of women at different levels of leadership and decision-making.

Considering that the Regional Diversity and Inclusion Policy was approved in 2016, gender equality and women's empowerment are an important part of its processes and have been one of the emphases of the objectives set forth in the regional plans of the last three years; The 27th Interamerican Scout Conference, held in Panama in 2018, recognizing the importance of the role of women in WOSM leadership and decision-making positions and the need to promote their equitable participation, requested the Interamerican Scout Committee to conduct a study on the participation of women in leadership and decision-making positions at different levels in the Interamerican Scout Region.

Resolution 9/2022: Promotion of Female Leadership in the Member Organisations of the Region was approved by the 28th Interamerican Scout Conference. It agreed to request the Interamerican Scout Committee to take the measures it deems necessary to promote more women in leadership and decision-making positions at all levels of the Interamerican Scout Region; to invite the Member Organisations of the Region to generate and implement strategies that strengthen gender equity and the empowerment of women within their structures; to urge the Member Organisations of the Region, taking into account the results of the study on female leadership in the Interamerican Region, conducted by the Interamerican Scout Committee during the period 2018-2022, to take the necessary measures to improve the current situation of lack of female leadership in the Interamerican Scout Region; and finally, to invite the Member Organizations of the Region to actively promote the nomination, access, and placement of women in leadership and decision-making positions at all levels of the Organization.

This document addresses some concepts regarding women's empowerment in the community and WOSM. It also presents suggested actions for developing a women's empowerment and gender strategy in the National Scout Organizations of the Interamerican Region.



What is Women's Empowerment?

The concept of women's empowerment has transformed over time. This concept is closely linked to the idea of power, a power traditionally associated with the ability to physically acquire or possess something. However, it is important to consider how women's empowerment relates not only to external processes such as assuming positions and increasing income, but also to the way these processes provide women with intangible resources such as self-esteem, reflective and analytical skills, collective organization, and political advocacy.

Therefore, instead of thinking of power in terms of the instruments that powerful agents use to prevent the less powerful from acting freely, it would be more useful to think of it as *"the social boundaries that define the fields of action for all actors and facilitate or hinder what is considered possible"*. These social boundaries are constituted by the laws, norms, customs, and social identities that frame and restrict people's actions. By defining power as *"the network of social boundaries that define fields of action"*, Hayward reformulates the question about power: the issue is no longer how power is distributed or how A exerts power over B, but rather *"how the mechanisms of power define the (im)possible, the (im)probable, the natural, the normal, what counts as a problem"*.

Consequently, women's empowerment should be measured in terms of *"how much influence women have over external actions that affect their well-being"*. There is consensus among development feminists that women's empowerment is a long-term, *"inside-out"* and *"bottom-up"* process, beginning at the personal level through the development of a positive self-image and confidence in one's abilities, continuing at the level of close relationships through the ability to negotiate and influence family relationships, and expanding to a collective dimension in which women build organizational structures strong enough to achieve social and political change.



In turn, when proposing a female empowerment strategy, it is important to consider the following concepts:

- **Resources:** Resources include not only material resources but also human and social resources that serve to enhance the ability to choose. These resources are acquired through multiple social relationships in diverse institutional contexts and are a reflection of the rules and norms that determine the principles of institutional distribution and exchange (Kabeer, 1999).
- **Agency:** The agency, in this theoretical framework, refers to the ability to make strategic decisions and control the resources and decisions that affect their lives. Agency involves the meaning, motivation, and purpose that individuals imbue their actions.

In this way, Kabeer (1999) points out that the relationship between resources and agency constitutes what is known as capabilities, which give rise to results (functions). However, despite the emphasis on expanding the individual's ability to choose, it is relevant to mention that from Kabeer's perspective, empowerment must be both individual and collective. Empowerment is relational, given that the acquisition of resources is expressed individually (e.g., an academic degree belongs to a subject), but it is acquired and exercised collectively (e.g., collegial learning). Likewise, agency implies the exercise of "*power to*," "*power with*," and "*power from within*" to achieve individual and collective goals (Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007). It is in its collective nature that empowerment's usefulness as a tool for raising awareness and transforming the structures that perpetuate unequal power relations lies (Pearse and Connell, 2006). In turn, Tasli (2007) states that empowerment is a long-term, dynamic, and open-ended process that involves broad and profound changes in socioeconomic, political, and cultural structures. Therefore, it is impossible to speak of beginnings, middles, or ends of the process, nor can it be defined in terms of specific activities or definitive results. This process, while following different paths, constantly feeds back; and it is unique because it is affected by different factors and actors in multiple spheres. Based on Rowlands' (1997) postulates, Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) propose four types of agency that could lead to empowerment: choice, control, change, and community belonging. Thus, they define four spheres of empowerment:

1. Empowerment as control, "*power over*" – control over personal decisions.
2. Empowerment as choice, "*power to*" – autonomy and decision-making within the home.
3. Empowerment in the community, "*power with*" – changing aspects of one's life.
4. Empowerment as change, "*power from within*" – changing aspects of one's life at the community level.

Thus, what may be empowering in some contexts and spheres may be disempowering in others. Additionally, viewing gender equality as the fulfillment of a set of universal goals carries the risk of ignoring the inequalities between women and how the intersections that characterize them lead to different assessments and degrees of achievement of gender equality.

In short, empowerment as a process presupposes women's ability to exercise their agency in a context where they have a set of real possibilities for choice and whose ultimate goal is the transformation of the structures of oppression that have in the past prevented them from making decisions on strategic issues that affect their lives. Additionally, the empowerment strategy recognizes that, if the structures of oppression are systemic, a multidimensional and interconnected approach is necessary to transform them. Thus, for example, it is not enough for women to have access to an income if this will translate into higher rates of domestic violence (Castiblanco and Raigosa, 2020; Calderón et al., 2011). It is necessary to recognize that progress in one dimension does not automatically translate into others and that gender equality is not achieved through partial achievements. Thus, gender equality is a political objective that stems from the recognition that nothing is gender-neutral. The pursuit of gender equality shifts the focus of attention from women to social organization, understanding that it is within this framework that inequalities are created and perpetuated. Thus, gender equality requires a change in the way social structures are conceived, as well as *"the social structures that maintain unequal power relations; that is, it requires the transformation of the political and institutional frameworks that reproduce unequal ideas, procedures, and organizational cultures"* (Cirujano, 2006, p. 80).



How can we develop a gender and women's empowerment strategy in our National Scout Organizations?

1. Diagnosis and characterization:

Collect qualitative and quantitative data. This will allow us to understand how far NSOs have developed their diversity and inclusion policies. This will also allow us to evaluate which strategies are best to implement at the regional level and gain a much clearer picture of the reality in our region. It will also enable the region to advise and support each NSO's processes.

How can we begin collecting qualitative and quantitative data?

- Evaluate the level of achievement of SDG 5 targets in each member country of the World Scout Movement.
- Evaluate the feasibility of developing/meeting with the diversity and inclusion working teams of each NSO.
- Conduct roundtable discussions or focus groups between Scouts and different organizations, collectives, or leaders on the topic to gain different perspectives. Strategies must be built collectively, through the creation of bridges, and must be built from differences.
- Indices to measure female empowerment: Super Index (15 questions that measure female empowerment through three dimensions: attitude towards violence, social independence and decision-making).

2. Agree on the commitments under which the strategy must be submitted:

Proposal considering the objectives of the UN's "Strategy for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2018–2021)":



- Strengthen the region's achievement of results on gender equality and women's empowerment through the creation of measurement and data collection tools that can be provided to each NSO and the development of activities that strengthen youth programs and educate adults in the movement: promoting gender equality and women's empowerment across our NSOs through systematic efforts to understand and respond to gender inequalities.
- Strengthen institutional capacity (from NSOs to the region itself) and effectiveness to improve the achievement of results on gender equality and women's empowerment: through the transformation of organizational culture to build and sustain a modern organization.

3. Create a body or team that is accountable for the implementation of the strategy:

This may fall within the functions of the Governing Body or National Team, as there may already be a body responsible for this responsibility in each NSO. However, it is important to evaluate how these bodies operate and determine the type of support from the region for these types of teams in each NSO that can be held accountable for the implementation of the diversity and inclusion policy and the proposed strategy.

4. Propose strategic performance spheres:

The UN has performance indicators that it uses as a benchmark to evaluate the achievement of its strategy goals. Therefore, it is important to design or agree on parameters under which the strategy and its implementation can be evaluated, along with the diversity and inclusion policy in each country. These parameters should support the design of the "strategic performance spheres," which are equivalent to general goals that are consistent with these parameters. It is also important to consider that "monitoring public gender equality policies requires **not only** the use of standardized universal indicators, but **also** methodological tools that address the interrelationships between resources, agency, and results that underlie more equitable gender relations" (Castiblanco, 2022).

5. Development of support materials:

Propose a booklet explaining key concepts about women's empowerment and gender (similar to those presented in the region's diversity and inclusion policy), as a way to educate NSOs on how to implement strategies or for this material to serve as a guide for them to develop their own effective strategies. Similarly, the creation of support materials (booklets, webinars, illustrations,

audiovisual materials) provides methodological tools "that approach the interrelationships between resources, agency, and results that underlie more equitable gender relations" (Castiblanco, 2022).

Bibliography:

Compilation of ideas taken from the texts:

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