

# Planting the Seeds of Equity

Proceedings of the  
Inter-American Forum  
“The Role of Education in  
Preventing Gender-based  
Violence”





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## Proceedings of the Inter-American Forum “The Role of Education in Preventing Gender-based Violence”

The Gender and Diversities Institute at EDC

El Centro de Investigaciones en Estudios de la Mujer  
Universidad de Costa Rica



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# Preface



Gendered violence affects every aspect of women’s lives, because violence impacts not just those who are its direct victims. Violence and the threat of violence limit women’s ability to participate in public activities, walk in city streets, voice (and even have) opinions in their homes, gain an education, participate in training programs, care for their children and loved ones—the list goes on and on. Indeed, apart from death, the effects of psychological violence are what many victims of violence say are the most damaging, because they kill you inside. They make you unsure of your worth and ability, and afraid to think or do something that might provoke more violence.

Those who work with women in areas of health, education, and work must by necessity deal with the issue of violence against women. And there are many individuals and organizations who work directly in violence prevention and services for victims of violence. One of the Gender and Diversities Institute’s important areas of work—and one that is integrated into our other areas of action—has been the issue of gendered violence. The institute looks at and engages in research and practice that incorporates diversities such as race, ethnicity, social class, ability, language, and culture into a gendered perspective on the issue. We recognize that gendered violence is maintained and reproduced, and even fostered, by existing societal systems and structures. We also recognize that this violence includes sexual harassment, homophobic violence, and violence against transgendered people, and is based on deeply ingrained gender-role stereotypes and expectations.

The inter-American forum that was the genesis for this publication was conceived by the institute as a way for practitioners and researchers in the Americas to engage in a dialogue on the issue that would capture local contexts and approaches, and focus on sharing the vast amount of learning that has occurred in this region over decades. The forum was intentionally different from others in several respects:

1. The participants were not the “in crowd” that are often visible at international gatherings. While most of the Latinas were members of a network that met and collaborated, they were a mixture of practitioners and of women doing concrete work in the university setting on the issue of gendered violence. The U.S. and Canadian representatives were in large part practitioners who are connected directly to communities and project work, as well as curriculum and resource developers.
2. We were not working toward a consensus document or an agreement. While we came together with the hope that bridges could be built for continuing collaborations, and that some commonalities in approach would support this,

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our focus was on sharing local contexts and different approaches and learning based on these contexts. We wanted to have our assumptions challenged and to capture and engage with diversity.

When we broached the possibility of a forum like this with Laura Guzmán, the director of the University of Costa Rica's Center for Research in Women's Studies (CIEM), an alliance was begun that resulted in a truly collaborative international exchange. Dr. Guzmán and her team at the CIEM worked over months to assemble the list of participants from Latin America and gather them, coordinate the forum logistics, and partner in shaping the forum content. The planning and work done by this team built for participants the space for a stimulating and challenging exchange, one that has continued even after the event itself.

We heard from practitioners who work with victims of natural disaster in Nicaragua, on the aftermaths of civil war in Guatemala, with Latino youth in the United States, and pregnant and parenting teens in Costa Rica. Participants shared strategies from the fields of health, law, education, and social work. They focused on work ranging from prevention in early childhood to the creation of gender-sensitive and inclusive curricula at the postsecondary level.

Hard questions were posed, and challenging discussions were begun. Issues including regional inequities in power, economy, and access to resources were raised. In the end, some understandings were reached about ways to begin and maintain truly collaborative projects and continue the conversation. A number of alliances were begun that are continuing. For example, most of the participants are now members of a specially created electronic discussion forum co-facilitated by Gender and Diversities Institute staff and the participant from Honduras. The bilingual discussion has allowed ongoing exchange on some of the topic areas raised at the forum, and, as the participant from Nicaragua reflected, "has generated in me a sense of belonging to a group that has some permanence, even though each one of us are in our own country, weighed down in the resolving of daily problems."

The issue of gendered violence is one that will take time and sustained effort to eradicate, and must inevitably be addressed from a range of perspectives and across multiple fields. As many of the participants echoed, it will also require envisioning a life-affirming culture, creating a female-positive symbolism, and nurturing that vision toward which we are striving. Continued exchange on what we are learning in different settings and from different focuses will aid us all and make that path easier to travel.

*Sundra Flansburg  
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