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CENTER'S ORIGINS:

The National Center for the Development of Women and the Family (Hereinafter referred to as the CMF, after its initials in Spanish), is a public organization charged with the promotion, direction and coordination of policies concerning women and the family, at the national level and in accordance with present laws and regulations.

The Center's origins date back to 1974, when an Office of Programs Related to Women and the Family, was created. Its objective was to coordinate all official activities concerning the celebration of the International Women's Year in 1975, which was also the starting year of the Women's Decade. Thus, 1975 became the starting point of a process, backed up by the United Nations, which resulted in many different activities and in important international regulations affecting the conditions of women in the world. One of those regulations clearly stated the need, on behalf of the different states, to create organizations or national institutions specifically dedicated to the promotion of women's welfare.

Such an organization was created in Costa Rica in November 11th, 1976, by means of Bill Nbr. 5988 (modified and updated by the Legislative Assembly Bill dated March 20th, 1986. The regulations were officially accepted by Executive Decree, date May 9th, 1986.

The importance of these Bills cannot be overstressed, since a national organization thus created by legislative bill and not by decrees or other minor ruling, would not face the too common problem of institutional instability. Moreover, it often happens that a government change affects the executive decrees and this, in turn, affects the current status of national organizations. This is not the case for this Costa Rican institution.

The Bill which created the CMF, confirmed its wide range as the institution charged with the promotion, direction and coordination of official policies concerning women's welfare. These responsibilities, concerning a particular gender, were duly stressed by the Amendment of 1990, called "The Promotion of Social Equality for Women", which established the CMF's first obligation of protecting the rights of women, and the "equality of gender".

This legal strength and the wide field of action are the bases upon which the Center builds its goals; President Figueres-Olsen and his Government are compromised in changing the Center's profile, from a "welfare assistance" program towards a policy control and management institution-role, as prescribed by the Law. It is in this direction, that one of the first official actions of his government was to modify the Center's Regulations, by means of an Executive Decree, dated June 10th, 1994, aiming to a general updating of the Center's operations, as well as to specify its coordination role towards the Ministry Offices for Women, a new institution to be established.

OTHER PROGRAMS:

Besides the above mentioned work areas, the CMF also develops its own projects and programs, according to what is established in the Regulations and according to its division of Work Areas. The most important are the following:

- **Training and Organization:**

This consists of a wide-range training program directed to various sectors:

Public servants and officers involved with planning programs and projects, so that they will include the "gender" variable in their documentation.

Women's groups and/or organizations, groups which might become women's organizations, especially those with few resources and those located far from the metropolitan areas. These will be counselled on organizational and productive aspects, as well as on profit-making actions.

Community female leaders to be counselled on aspects such as: self-esteem, leadership, organization, social and political participation, citizens' rights and duties, Government institutions, etc.

Teachers and educators, in order to prepare them for a change of values and to the necessity of eliminating all forms of discrimination against women or based on gender.

To those working in communications, so that they be able to incorporate the notion of gender in their productions. To prepare an annual contest in order to reward those media (press, radio or television) that broadcast or publish adequate information concerning women.

- **A program to foster a better participation of women in politics:**

This program aims to the creation of a network of information, at the national level, which will allow women to know more about their rights, as well as about the methods to enforce those rights, including access to administration of justice. This effort shall include workshops and discussion panels on the said subjects, intended for female leaders all over the country.

- **Documentation and Information:**

This area will be charged with the creation and dissemination of information regarding decision-making factors, such as: economic indexes, press releases, institutions working on women and families, programs and projects related to women/family, research, etc. This area counts with support from the Documentation Center, which includes publications related to women/family issues, a video collection and other services; the Center also offers publications on four major areas: theory, methodology, topics, and documents.

PROGRAMS AND ACTIONS:

The main actions of the CMF shall be related to the five most important programs and shall be under the supervision of the Executive Director:

- **PIOMH: Plan for Equal Opportunity between Women and Men**
This plan consists of the gathering of representatives from different government branches and ministries in order to obtain a coherent and harmonic plan which will eventually result in a substantial change in the promotion of women's conditions.
- **OMM: Coordination Group of Ministerial Offices on Women**
The OMM's are offices located in different Ministries and government autonomous institutions. They were created by agreement and decree of the Social Sector Council, on May, 1994. It is their objective to implement the CMF's policies on women. The CMF also acts as the general coordinator, as it is established in the decree. The Coordination Group admits all the OMM as well as any other institution working on the subject of women.
- **The National Plan on Attention and Prevention of Family Violence**
This Plan covers various subjects: inter-institutional coordination for the Plan's implementation; coordination with other official institutes charged with the problems of family violence at the national level; support to the said official institutions; the implementation of a nation-wide campaign, using mass media, on the subject and on possible solutions. In order to provide immediate help to the victims of family violence, there is a Project called "Shelter for the Abused Women" which will count with professional help for women and their children, after a violent act in the family.
- **Plan to include the "Gender" variable in official development plans and programs**
This plan aims particularly to: the "National Program for Fighting Poverty", working on some priority areas as established by the Government; to the "National Plan for Fighting Poverty", in "Pro-Women" sector; and to the "National Plan on Development", coordinated by the Ministry of Economic Policies.
- **Activities related to the "IV World Conference on Women" (at Beijing, China, 1995)**
This action area refers to the preparation of activities leading to the said Conference, as well as the preparation of follow-up activities to be implemented after the Conference. These activities shall include: forums, workshops, counselling, publications, etc.). This group will be dedicated to identifying the main fields of action at the national level, in order to improve the situation of women, if discriminated because of their gender.

ATTRIBUTIONS:

According to the present regulations, these are the Center's main functions:

- To protect to rights of women, as stated in both international conventions and declarations and the Costa Rican legislation.
- To promote the equality between genders.
- To perform actions regarding to the improvement of women's conditions.
- To coordinate government services that favor women and the family and assure their enforcement.
- To formulate and implement programs on Basic and Elementary education, as well as on professional training for women.
- To formulate and implement development programs for the family, focused on women.
- To formulate and implement programs on labor and production.
- To collaborate with the eventual adoption of national policies concerning children care centers.
- To formulate and adopt cultural programs for women.
- To conduct research on the main obstacles to women's full participation in social, politic and economic actions.
- To formulate plans and programs towards the eradication of the above stated obstacles.
- To promote the effective enforcement of international agreements related to women and the family, undersigned by the State, as well as to promote the adhesion to other similar agreements.
- To promote the creation of women's associations for the betterment of the family, and to offer assessment to such organizations.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The Bill of Law which create the CMF also establishes that the Executive Director is the legal representative of the Institution, charge with its administration. Moreover, there shall be an Administrative Board which will count with six members, representing government departments, and which will be presided by the Executive Director as Chairperson. The institutions to be represented are the following:

- The Ministry of Public Health.
- The Ministry of Public Education.
- The Ministry of Labor and Social Security.
- The Ministry of Justice and Grace.
- The Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policies.
- The National Board on Infancy.

WORK AREAS:

As it is established in the Regulations, the CMF subdivides its main task into six work areas, which are described as follows:

- **Research Area:**
Charged with doing research, both informative and scientific, in order to support the policies and actions to be taken concerning women and their families. It coordinates its work with private and public institutions working on similar objectives, in order to propose defined goals and actions.
- **Communications Area:**
It formulates and implements communication policies; it outlines public relations policies with official departments and organizations. It establishes the regulations to be followed on rendering information about women and the family. It develops programs and messages to be delivered thru mass media, aiming to a change of attitude towards women and the family.
- **Documentation Area:**
It files and stores updated information on the subjects of women, gender and the family; it stores information produced at the CMF; it publishes information and makes such information available to the general public.
- **Training and Organization Area:**
It formulates and develops programs on permanent education and professional training; in coordination with other organizations and public institutions as well as private, it trains officers on different subjects, emphasizing women's participation. It contributes to the modification of cultural patterns which discriminate women. It promotes the creation of women's associations and provides them with technical assessment.
- **Legal Area:**
It provides legal counselling to the Executive Director and to the administrators, as well as to the other Work Areas and women's organizations assisted by the CMF. It promotes and develops programs and actions on legislation and women's rights. It designs and develops programs to promote equal opportunity between men and women.
- **Administrative Area:**
This area subdivides into five departments: Accounting, Budgeting, Treasury, Supplies and Storage.