



WOMEN AND WORK

Seminar for Members of Parliamentary Bodies Dealing
with Gender Equality and Committees Addressing
Labour Issues

6–8 December 2007

ILO Headquarters, Geneva



International Labour Organization



Inter-Parliamentary Union



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Jointly organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the International Labour Organization



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A beneficiary of the Grameen Bank project on poverty eradication sits in front of fabrics for sale in the market. Bogra, Bangladesh. 2 November 2008.
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Rural women at a literacy class. Bantantinnting, Senegal. 15 June 2006. © UN Photo/Evan Schneider.

Senator Pia Cayetano addresses the IPU Meeting of Women Parliamentarians, Philippines, 2005.
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Foreword

Over the past two decades, there has been a massive influx of women into the workforce in every region in the world. Greater numbers of women are involved in public services and an increasing number of countries are adopting equal opportunity policies to encourage and enable women to join the labour market.

Yet, despite significant progress in education and access to decision-making posts, women's status in the workplace reflects neither their educational achievements nor their work experience. Indeed, women continue to face numerous obstacles to accessing the labour market and to progressing within it. Women almost everywhere still earn less than men for work of equal value; they have fewer opportunities to obtain better-paid jobs; and they still assume the lion's share of domestic responsibilities. In many countries, women face discrimination in the workplace based on assumptions about women's role in society and on what jobs are "appropriate" for women.

It was against this backdrop that, in December 2007, for the second Conference for members of parliamentary committees dealing with the status of women and gender equality, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) joined forces with the International Labour Organization (ILO) to focus on the question of *Women and Work*. The two-and-a-half-day meeting, held at ILO headquarters in Geneva, attracted more than 120 members of parliament and parliamentary staff from 49 countries. The participants' objective was to identify priority areas for action and to suggest parliamentary initiatives to achieve equality between men and women in the labour market.

As this report shows, discussions ranged widely, from an examination of old and new forms of dis-

crimination against women, both in the work place and on the way to it, to how to help women and men reconcile their family and work responsibilities, how to encourage and support women entrepreneurs, how to improve women's access to social protection, such as health care and parental leave, and how to combat discrimination, exploitation and sexual harassment in the workplace. At the heart of every discussion was the understanding that parliaments, through the detailed policy work done in parliamentary committees, can be instrumental in expanding women's access to work, making safe the conditions in which they work, and improving their status within the workforce.

The recommendations that emerged from the seminar attest to the breadth of the debates and suggest the diversity of actions and strategies needed to improve the lives of women at work. As long as half of a country's resources for development—its women—are prevented from achieving their potential, the entire country stands to lose. We hope that this report will encourage parliamentarians to work together, across party lines and across national boundaries, to achieve equality between men and women in the labour market, and to give all women the opportunity to contribute to the development of the societies in which they live.



Anders B. Johansson
Secretary General
Inter-Parliamentary Union

Contents

Summary and Recommendations of the Seminar	1
Opening Remarks	5
Mr. Assane Diop Executive Director, Social Protection, International Labour Organization	
Keynote Address	8
Women and Work: Key Trends and Challenges Ms. Nouzha Skalli, Minister of Social Development, Family and Solidarity, Morocco	
1. Changing Patterns of Work in a Global Context	
Overview and Debate	14
<i>Presentations:</i>	
Women and Work: The Global Dimension	18
Dr. Stephanie Ware Barrientos, Institute of Development Policy and Management, School of Environment and Development, University of Manchester, United Kingdom	
Equality of Work Opportunities between Men and Women in the Gulf Cooperation Council States	21
Dr. Nedal Mohammed Al Tenaiji, Member of the Federal National Council, United Arab Emirates	
Changing Patterns in the World of Work: Women, Men and Working Conditions	28
Mr. Jon C. Messenger, Senior Research Officer, Conditions of Work and Employment Programme, ILO	
Changing Patterns of Work in a Global Context	32
Senator Sharon Carstairs, Parliament of Canada	
2. Old and New Forms of Discrimination at Work	
Overview and Debate	36
<i>Presentations:</i>	
Gender Discrimination at the Workplace: Trends, Issues and Policy Implications	39
Ms. Manuela Tomei, Chief, Conditions of Work and Employment Branch, Labour Protection Department, ILO	

Ending Labour Market Gender Discrimination: Bringing Gender Mainstreaming to Parliamentary Laws and Institutions	43
Ms. Mary Cornish, Senior partner, Cavalluzzo Hayes Shilton McIntyre & Cornish Law Firm; Chair of Ontario's Equal Pay Coalition	

3. Panel on Women's Entrepreneurship

Overview and Debate	54
---------------------------	----

Presentations:

Developing Women's Entrepreneurship: Challenges and Opportunities	57
Ms. Jyoti Tuladhar, Senior Specialist on Gender Issues, Bureau for Gender Equality, ILO	

Women's Role as Innovators: Bahraini Women in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises	60
Dr. Fawzia Saeed Al-Saleh and Ms. Wedad Mohamed Al-Fadel, Members of the Consultative Council, Kingdom of Bahrain	

Women and Work: Strategies for the Future, Microfinance and Women's Empowerment in Uganda	65
Ms. Jalia Bintu Abwoili Lukumu, Member of Parliament, Chairperson of the Committee on Equal Opportunities, Uganda	

4. Panel on Reconciling Family and Work

Overview and Debate	70
---------------------------	----

Presentations:

Reconciling Work and Family Responsibilities: Issues and Challenges	73
Ms. Naomi Cassirer, Senior Technical Officer, Conditions of Work and Employment Programme, ILO	

Trade Union Views and Practices on Achieving Equality at Work	76
Ms. Marieke Koning, Equality Officer, International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)	

The Importance of International Labour Standards to Promoting Gender Equality	79
Ms. Raquel Gonzalez, Assistant Director of the Geneva Office of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)	

Reconciling Family and Work	81
Mr. Carlos Recondo, Member of the Chamber of Deputies, Chile	

5. Panel on Access to Social Protection

Overview and Debate	84
---------------------------	----

Presentations:

Women and Access to Social Protection	88
Ms. Shahra Razavi, Research Coordinator, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)	

Enhancing Women’s Security at Work: Social Protection and Access to the Labour Market in Sweden	91
Ms. Desirée Pethrus Engström, Member of the Labour Committee, Parliament of Sweden	
Implications of Ageing for Social Protection and Women	94
Ms. Sylvia Beales, Head of Strategic Alliances, HelpAge International	
Women and Work: Key Trends and Challenges	97
Ms. Renana Jhabvala, National Coordinator, Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA)	

6. Panel on Reducing Risks and Vulnerabilities

Overview and Debate	100
<i>Presentations:</i>	
Using the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to Address Discrimination against Women in Employment	102
Ms. Pramila Patten, Member of the UN CEDAW Committee	
Mechanisms for Combating Discrimination, Exploitation, Abuse and Violence in the Workplace	112
Ms. Eve Bazaiba Masudi, Senator and Chairperson of the Committee on Socio-cultural Affairs, Democratic Republic of the Congo	
Women’s Right to Sustainable Development in Paraguay	115
Ms. María Cristina Semidei, Parliamentary Gender Expert, Paraguay	

7. What Next? Strategies for the Future

Overview and Debate	118
<i>Presentations:</i>	
Strategies for the Future	121
Baroness Uddin, Member of the House of Lords, United Kingdom	
What Next? Strategies for the Future	123
Ms. Yasmin Ratansi, Member of the House of Commons, Chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, Canada	
List of Participants	126

Summary and Recommendations of the Seminar

Women and Work was the general topic of the second Conference for members of parliamentary committees dealing with the status of women and gender equality. The seminar, organised by the IPU in cooperation with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), took place from 6–8 December 2007 at ILO headquarters in Geneva. The meeting brought together more than 120 members of parliament and parliamentary staff from 49 countries.

The meeting was opened by IPU Secretary General, Mr. A. B. Johnsson, and Mr. A. Diop, Executive Director of Social Protection at the ILO. It was chaired by the President of the IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians, Ms. M. Xavier, Senator from Uruguay. A keynote address was delivered by Ms. N. Skalli, Minister of Social Development, Family and Solidarity, Morocco, and more than 20 presentations and case studies were presented by experts. The highlights of the expert presentations and the plenary debate are presented in the report that follows.

The meeting elected Ms. Desirée Pethrus Engström, Member of the Labour Committee, Parliament of Sweden, as its rapporteur. The concluding comments presented at the closing session follow.

* * *

We have come together these past two and a half days to discuss and exchange experiences on women and work. Our objective has been to identify key priority areas for action and parliamentary initiatives and strategies to achieve equality between men and women on the labour market.

We would like to recall that gender equality is at the core of development and a condition for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Empowering women on the labour market is therefore instrumental.

Our discussions began by taking stock of recent trends related to women and work. The past two decades have seen a massive influx of women in the labour force, although there are significant variations from one region to another. Despite important progress in women's education and access to decision-making positions, their status on the labour market is not commensurate with their educational achievements and work experience.

Women continue to face numerous challenges in accessing the labour market. More often than not they obtain jobs that are of a lesser quality than men's, they are discriminated against in the workplace, they experience poor working conditions and job insecurity, and they are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. The difficult environment in which they work often results in less security in their post-professional life.

There is no single solution to address these challenges and reach the objective of equality at work. Rather, there are a variety of approaches, reflecting the diversity of situations and country experiences. The following is by no means an exhaustive summary of the range of experiences and detailed practices that were examined during the conference. Rather, it aims to highlight the main strategies and elements that can contribute to achieving progress.

First, we need to build a **gender-sensitive environment**. We cannot hope to address challenges related to women and work without taking into account the wider situation and the need to secure respect for women's fundamental rights in general. Women's economic empowerment cannot be achieved without tackling gender inequality.

Such an environment also needs **gender-sensitive actors**. Women should be present in all bodies, including governments, parliaments, trade unions and enterprises, not only in high numbers, but also in key decision-making positions. In this regard, IPU is

called on to pursue its work in favour of a stronger participation of women in parliament.

Second, to secure and promote equality for women in the workplace, we must begin with a strong and effective **legal framework**. Developing gender-sensitive legislation is the basic foundation for which we – as parliamentarians – have responsibility. National legislation must meet the international standards and benchmarks to which our countries are committed. It must also address national realities and serve the interests of all of our constituents, including rural women and marginalized women.

Developing adequate and gender-responsive legislation requires reliable, comprehensive, sex-disaggregated **data**. We need to build our national statistical capacities. We call on international organizations such as the ILO and the IPU to provide us with comparative research that can inform our legislative work. The creation of a database of legislation on women and work, and of best practices, in particular with regard to implementation measures, is recommended. The provision of information on general legal frameworks required would also be welcome.

“We must also make sure that we raise issues relating to gender equality in public debates and help forge national consensus on these issues.”

Third, while legislation is necessary, it is not sufficient, as there is often a gap between de jure and de facto equality, i.e. there is a gap between legislation and its effective **implementation**. Responsibility for bridging this gap lies also with parliamentarians, as we can oversee the implementation of policies and programmes to ensure that they meet the standards and goals we have set. We must ask the difficult questions and hold governments to account. Budgets need to match the priorities set in legislation and national policies.

We must also make sure that we raise issues relating to gender equality in public debates and help forge national consensus on these issues. In addition, we must ensure that legislation is easily accessible and well understood by the people, including through sensitization and educational campaigns, translation into local languages and public debates.

Fourth, in the context of globalization, **international actors** can strongly influence countries’ development agendas, without necessarily being subject to national scrutiny or having national interests as their first priority. In order to lessen possible negative effects and advance equality, we must aim for globalization processes that are inclusive and consultative. It is important to maintain open channels of communication and forge **alliances** between the various stakeholders, from the local to the international levels. This must also mean that we have to increase our own involvement in, and oversight of, the multilateral system in order to encourage better performance and accountability of international organizations.

Fifth, as parliamentarians, we must ensure that our countries are State parties to **international treaties** and texts related to gender equality and work: for instance, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; ILO Conventions on Maternity Protection (No.183), Equal Remuneration for Men and Women (No. 100), Discrimination (No.111); Workers with Family Responsibilities (No.156), and Social Security (Minimum Standards – No.102). With regard to the social partners (trade unions and employers), which are key partners in achieving progress for women in the workplace, ILO Conventions 87 and 98 are also worth mentioning. For those of our countries that are parties to these international treaties, we have an obligation as parliamentarians to monitor effective implementation at the national level, oversee government action in this field, raise awareness and sensitize citizens to their rights. We must also regularly review the validity of reservations certain parties may have made to some treaties and aim for their gradual removal.

Sixth, facilitating women’s access to work begins with providing them with **education**, not only to lift them out of poverty, but also to ensure their economic empowerment and security. Education alone, however, is not sufficient to avoid employment discrimination against women. The example of declining average earnings in professions that have become “feminized” in recent years suggest that other policy measures are needed to eliminate discrimination and ensure equal opportunities at work for both men and women.

An increasing number of women are now in the paid workforce across the world; however, women

still perform the vast majority of *unpaid* economic and care work. Giving visibility to **unpaid work** is therefore a priority. There is a need for recognition of women's continuing heavy burden of unpaid work in the light of their increasing participation in the paid labour force. We need to consider what the best policies are to enable women to participate in the paid workforce; we also need to develop mechanisms to include unpaid care work in the formal accounts of national economic activity.

Seventh, access to paid work for women is closely linked to the **challenge of reconciling family and work**. We must explore incentives to enable a more balanced sharing of family responsibilities between the State and families and between men and women, including paternity and parental leave entitlements, childcare arrangements, maternity protection, and investments in infrastructure and services. Implementing such policies may require sensitization and educational initiatives aimed at changing mentalities.

As parliamentarians, we also have a special responsibility to pay particular attention to our work space and its functioning, with a view to ensuring that it facilitates women's participation. Our parliaments need to be gender-sensitive and offer facilities and some flexibility to allow women MPs and women members of the secretariat to reconcile family and work obligations. The provision of certain facilities such as crèches or the limitations of late/night meetings are some initiatives that could be considered.

Reviewing working time policies is an additional need. The emergence of **new forms of employment** contracts characterized by flexibility (part-time, temporary work, self-employment) has the potential to increase female labour force participation. However, in view of the poor quality of many of these jobs, it remains important to provide terms of employment that are equivalent to those of full-time workers, particularly regarding wages, social security coverage and pensions. In addition, very long working hours also restrict time available to dedicate to family life, and efforts are necessary to reduce excessive working hours and overtime for all workers.

Eighth, for women to set up their own business and become **entrepreneurs**, several challenges must be overcome. Constraints include lack of access to credit, finance and markets; lack of access to relevant education and training; gender-blind/gender-insensitive macro-economic policies; excessive administrative procedures; lack of cultural acceptance and

recognition of women as entrepreneurs and social restrictions posing problems in reconciling public and private life.

To facilitate and promote women **entrepreneurship** we need to implement targeted measures. These can include affirmative action, programmes to ensure that women and men have equal access to resources, support and opportunities to run businesses, micro-credit facilities, and training programmes, including in ICT. It is also important to promote an entrepreneurial culture that motivates and engenders the community. For this, there needs to be an enabling legislative framework, with the possibility of tax rebates for female-led enterprises, integration of non-discriminatory clauses in all enterprise-related laws, and monitoring mechanisms.

“Particular attention needs to be paid to the ageing population and to the informal sector, which are both most likely not to benefit from adequate social protection policies.”

Ninth, access to **social protection** remains a challenge. While a variety of models exist, it is important to bear in mind gender biases and gender-differentiated impacts on men and women. Social security systems based on employment entitlements and contributions, for instance, can disadvantage women who may have spent considerable proportions of their adult working years performing essentially reproductive and societal tasks without remuneration, or in part-time work. Systems requiring fees and charges at public health facilities can lead to exclusion of the poorest. Particular attention needs to be paid to the ageing population and to the informal sector, which are both most likely not to benefit from adequate social protection policies.

Tenth, the CEDAW Convention is an effective instrument to combat discrimination against women in the workplace. It provides the framework for parliamentary action to identify and regularly review discrimination in existing legislation, policies and practices, and in the work culture. The reporting mechanism to the United Nations CEDAW Committee provides opportunities for regular stock-taking: parliaments should be strongly involved in this process, in particular in the follow-up of the Committee's

recommendations. Tackling discrimination requires as a priority reviewing laws with a view to removing discriminatory provisions. We wish to stress in particular the need to abolish legislation that limits or denies legal status to women.

Combating discrimination also requires building a culture of equality and tolerance, sensitization and raising awareness. Education is fundamental, and should start in the home. School curricula should also be reviewed to include education on human rights and gender equality.

Eleventh, protection of women in the workplace is another cause for concern, especially with regard to sexual abuse, harassment and exploitation. Measures and legislation must be taken to criminalize such behaviours. Efforts also need to be inclusive and cover all areas of work. Particular attention was paid to discrimination against women in the police, the military and in jails. The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women was invited to address this particular issue and produce a report on the subject.

Twelfth, progress will only result from the combined efforts of all stakeholders aimed at achieving equality. Political commitment, strong and sound regulatory frameworks, targeted public policies, partnerships, including with trade unions and employers, and sensitization campaigns are all important ingredients for success.

To ensure follow-up of the conference and its results, we need to take action when we get back home.

We need to disseminate the results of the meeting in parliament and bring them to the attention of specialized committees. We must also make use of all possible opportunities (including celebration of international, regional and national days for women) to draw attention to some of the issues discussed, raise awareness and trigger discussions and initiatives.

Networking among participants is also important in order to continue to support one another, share experiences, follow trends and highlight progress. Networking with other partners concerned with gender issues is also key. This can be done through electronic fora such as iKNOWpolitics (www.iKNOWpolitics.org), set up by IDEA, IPU, NDI, UNDP and UNIFEM.

Dissemination of the results of the meeting should also be ensured by the IPU and the ILO. The IPU is requested to circulate the results of the conference to all parliaments and present them at its next Assembly, to be held in Cape Town, South Africa (April 2008). A report on the conference, including presentations and highlights of the debates, should also be produced. The IPU Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians is asked to discuss follow-up of the conference and ways of monitoring initiatives taken and progress made.

Furthermore, we request that a conference of parliamentary bodies dealing with gender equality be organized next year. We would like to suggest that a session on follow-up of our conference on *Women and Work* be included in the programme. ■

Opening Remarks

Mr. Assane Diop

Executive Director, Social Protection,
International Labour Organization

On behalf of the Director-General of the ILO, Juan Somavía, I have the pleasure and honour of welcoming you to the ILO and to the joint IPU/ILO seminar on Women and Work.

One of the most striking developments in the past two decades has been the massive incorporation of women in the labour force, despite significant variations by region. Their share in high decision-making positions has also increased, although women remain a minority everywhere. Never before have women been as educated as today. And yet, their status in the labour market is not commensurate with their educational achievements and work experience. This entails a waste of human resources, undermines economic growth, and is unfair. This situation points to the existence of policy failures.

The main issue that most women face in contemporary societies is not so much access to the labour market, but rather the poor quality of the jobs that they manage to obtain. This phenomenon is linked in part to changes in the work patterns brought about by globalization and intensified competition. It concerns both genders, but women are more affected, and discrimination at work is one factor explaining the higher incidence of poor-quality jobs among them.

Poor-quality jobs undermine women's opportunities to improve their skills and their career prospects, and have a negative impact on their earnings during and after working life. Low-quality jobs are often synonymous with job insecurity, poor working conditions, lack of voice and representation and vulnerability to abuse and exploitation. Women's economic insecurity, coupled with the lack of adequate care services for children or elderly dependent family members, means distressed families and vulnerability to poverty. Too many women continue to die need-

lessly during pregnancy or while giving birth because of unsafe working environments or lack of maternity protection.

Enhancing women's status in the world of work means working towards a fair globalization for both men and women, while combating gender discrimination at work and in other social spheres alike.

There are neither easy nor blueprint approaches, but the experiences around the world show that, if certain conditions are met, change is not only desirable but also possible. Political commitment, strong and sound regulatory frameworks, targeted public policies, tripartite partnerships, and a vibrant civil society are all important ingredients for success.

“Political commitment, strong and sound regulatory frameworks, targeted public policies, tripartite partnerships, and a vibrant civil society are all important ingredients for success.”

The theme that you will address in the coming days – women, work and gender equality – is at the heart of the ILO's decent work agenda, which has become a global goal essential to meeting internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. Gender equality is both a development objective in its own right and a means to achieving decent work.

This seminar is another expression of the strong ties and collaboration that our two organizations have been forging over the past years. It is with great satisfaction that we can say today that the IPU and the ILO have been gradually shifting from cooperation on ad-hoc issues towards a more strategic, long-

term partnership to the mutual benefit of both institutions.

The IPU and the ILO, and their constituencies, represent a formidable match that can make a difference in ensuring a fair globalization by delivering decent work. The IPU brings a vast source of political and technical expertise and a wide network of Parliamentarians around the world. Parliaments adopt legislation, ratify international conventions, approve budgets, shape and oversee national policies and, most importantly, are grounded to the realities and everyday concerns of people.

The ILO's greatest strength lies in its tripartite constituency: governments, workers' and employers' organizations ensure a direct link to the realities, issues and challenges of the world of work. Other assets of the ILO comprise its broad knowledge on employment and social protection policy issues, and its standard-setting function.

The recommendations of the report of the World Commission on the Social Dimensions of Globalization gave the impetus for a more strategic cooperation between the IPU and the ILO. It underlined the key role that parliaments can play in ensuring stronger policy coherence between economic and social policies around the decent work agenda. The report also called upon parliaments and parliamentarians to progressively increase their oversight of the multilateral system in order to encourage better performance and accountability on the part of international organizations both in setting the global agenda and in assessing the results. The report also highlighted the importance of making the decent work agenda a global goal for a fair globalization. This goal has been embraced over the past years by a variety of national, regional (endorsed in the Summits of African leaders in Burkina Faso in 2004 and in the Americas in Argentina in 2005) and global institutions, including the High Level Segment of ECOSOC that in July 2006 mainstreamed the decent work agenda into the UN system.

In October 2006, the ILO and the IPU agreed to carry out a joint multi-year programme of work aimed at mobilizing parliaments around the decent work agenda. This programme seeks to assist parliaments in building national consensus around the key dimensions of the decent work agenda: ensuring respect for fundamental labour rights, promoting productive employment, promoting safe, healthy and fair workplaces and social protection for all, and strength-

ening social dialogue. Another important goal of this joint programme of work is to promote coherence and accountability of public policy at the global level.

The Meeting of Parliamentarians, held on the occasion of the ILO Forum on Decent Work for a Fair Globalization that took place in Lisbon between 31 October and 2 November 2007, provided another occasion to strengthen further the cooperation between the IPU and the ILO. An important outcome of the Meeting of Parliamentarians was the decision of establishing a parliamentary advisory group of 15 members on employment and decent work. Other commitments include the development of specific tools and the organization of information and experience-sharing meetings between parliamentarians at regional and global levels.

There are several areas for dialogue and joint work. But let me give you a couple of examples of how the ILO can cooperate in this endeavour.

“Such meetings not only encourage networking, alliance-building and experience-sharing among parliamentarians across countries, they also help bring the concerns and expectations of workers, employers and other actors to the attention of parliamentarians, and vice-versa.”

First, I would like to refer to the Toolkit for Mainstreaming Employment and Decent Work of the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), which was prepared by the ILO in close collaboration with other member agencies of the UN-CEB to help agencies and organizations measure the “decent work footprint” of what they do. The Toolkit is a very practical and user-friendly way of assisting international organizations, national governments and parliamentarians in assessing how they contribute to decent work. By connecting the dots between different fields of policy action around decent work, the toolkit provides a methodology to think and act in an integrated way. The toolkit also helps address social and economic policies from a gender perspective as it mainstreams gender throughout, thus contributing to gender equality. The international system is beginning to take the Toolkit up

and countries are following apace. The ILO is prepared to work with you in adapting/tailoring the Toolkit to your needs and circumstances.

Second, global meetings that focus on key themes, such as today's meeting, and that bring together workers, employers, members of parliament, academics and development practitioners, are another useful way of advancing the decent work agenda both nationally and globally. Such meetings not only encourage networking, alliance-building and experience-sharing among parliamentarians across countries, they also help bring the concerns and expectations of workers, employers and other actors to the attention of par-

liamentarians, and vice-versa. This is crucial for the design of well-balanced policies at both the national and global levels.

We hope this workshop will foster a better understanding of the impact of globalization on employment patterns and women's economic status, and enable participants to learn about initiatives aiming to address these challenges and get inspiration for further action. You provide hope for many millions of women throughout the world.

You have a chance to bring about positive changes in their lives and working conditions. I wish you success in your deliberations. ■

Keynote Address

Women and Work: Key Trends and Challenges

Ms. Nouzha Skalli

Minister of Social Development,
Family and Solidarity, Morocco

I am very pleased to open the 2007 Seminar for Chairpersons and Members of Parliamentary Bodies dealing with Gender Equality and other committees addressing labour issues. This is topic very close to my heart and I very much welcome the opportunity to share with you the experience of Morocco.

Major reforms have taken place in Morocco, such as the reform of the Family Code which for the first time has the principle of equality and shared responsibility between the sexes enshrined in law, and the Nationality Code which gives women the right to transmit their nationality automatically to their children – even if they are born to a foreign father. The budget now responds to gender needs and is an important instrument for equality in socio-economic rights in Morocco.

Moreover, His Majesty Mohammed VI, the King of Morocco, has recently appointed a new government, which contains seven women – that is, more than 20 per cent of the Government – who have been appointed to the strategically important positions in health; social development, family and solidarity; youth and sports; culture; energy, mines, water and the environment; education and foreign affairs. This is a very important step for Morocco, and one that shows that there is clear political determination at the highest level to empower women because we are convinced that strengthening the capacity of women is a vital tool for ensuring social fairness, equality and development – which we all want to achieve.

I would like to stress the role of parliamentarians in promoting equality, both in the world of work and in society in general in our countries. What are the key issues for women at work? Women have always worked. We are talking about strengthening the participation of women in the world of paid work but we should be aware that women have always taken on a

major proportion of the work done in our societies, and it is very important that this is now recognized.

The key importance of paid work to women is that it brings them financial independence, takes them out of the family home and challenges the traditional division of labour between men and women. The transfer of male–female relations into the public space is very important because it means that discrimination is much more difficult to hide, and it is also a key factor in combating poverty and promoting development. Paid work outside the home brings greater citizenship to women, enhances their status and gives them a key presence in the world of work, which is a key factor in their emancipation.

Throughout the world the presence of women in the world of work is increasing. An increasing proportion of the workforce is female – 56 per cent of the workforce worldwide is made up of women. This figure rises to 71 per cent in North America but is only 32 per cent in the Middle East and North Africa – so it is unequal throughout the world. In the Middle East and North Africa region, women's work is accepted but not integrated into the workforce. Surveys from 2000 show that, despite the increasing number of women working, the perception of the role of women remains clouded by traditional values. People believe that women must first and foremost work in the home before going out to work. Thus, any enhanced participation of women in active life is accompanied by an enhancement in their overall status. A number of international steps forward recognize women's participation as a key human right. The 1995 Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, and its follow-up mechanisms, the body of Treaties and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are all key instruments that can be used to

enhance the role of women, their participation in the world of work, and the values of equality.

There has also been an increase, however, in violence against women such as rape, domestic violence and sexual harassment at work. Unfortunately, the role of women in decision-making bodies also remains very limited. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) database provides regular visibility to the progress that women are making throughout the world in terms of their representation in parliaments. It is a vital tool for activists who are fighting for women's rights because it helps to raise awareness in countries and convince people that it is very important to enhance the role of women in parliaments. In terms of local representation by women in local authorities, we need more databases and more data to give the issue much more visibility. That is a challenge that the IPU or other bodies working in the area could try to meet.

In the past 10 years, the rate of participation by women in the world of work has stopped increasing, and sometimes there have even been steps backwards. Unemployment affects women more than men so the unemployment rate is much higher among women – both in Morocco and internationally.

“Women have fewer opportunities to take on paid work, and often work in the informal sectors of the economy where they do not benefit from social security provision.”

Women continue to suffer from discrimination in terms of wages and promotion. There is a wide wage gap between men and women. Young women have more access to education than in the past but, unfortunately, they do not tend to be promoted as much as men. Women have fewer opportunities to take on paid work, and often work in the informal sectors of the economy where they do not benefit from social security provision. More than 60 per cent of the people in the world who work for no pay in family businesses are women. Housewives or women working in the home carry out tasks that are unpaid and do not appear in national statistics in terms of output.

In terms of senior political posts or senior public officials, only 28 per cent of such posts are occupied by women in the world. There are major differences

between North America and the European Union and other areas of the world. Women remain in a very difficult situation in terms of access to employment, and they often find themselves in precarious and poorly paid positions.

Trade unions are a key element in protecting stability at work and defending workers' rights. Very often, however, there are not enough women in these trade unions. Women have very limited roles in trade unions, in spite of the increasing number of women in the world of work. The higher up you go in terms of decision-making, the fewer women there are. Perhaps, therefore, it is not surprising that trade union strategies rarely look at issues that particularly affect women.

The fight against discrimination is very widespread: most of the 180 Members of the International Labour Organization (ILO) have ratified the core Conventions against discrimination and these make it necessary to draw up policies to combat it. Significant progress has been made, with some countries having made very significant steps forward towards combating discrimination and promoting equality, but a number of obstacles remain and progress remains slow. Legal changes and reforms are often insufficient and women do not always benefit from these changes. Women continue to do extra, unpaid work such as domestic work. The gender gap remains very wide if you look at salaries, and this requires policies that have both counter-discrimination elements and measures to improve the relationship between work and family responsibilities. Fighting discrimination at work has major implications because the world of work is a key element for promoting equality and development, and helps to get over stereotypes and promote a more equal and fair culture. It will also help if education and training for women are improved.

Parliamentarians have a shared role with governments in legislation, and also a supervisory and scrutinizing role through the use of committees and reports. Parliamentarians scrutinize the role of government and it is very important that they do this effectively – particularly on issues relating to equality. For example, in committees where a minister attends with a team made up only of men, we should ask why. Such questions are important because they can lead ministers to ask important questions and to wonder why women do not have a more important role in public affairs.

Parliamentarians also deal with complaints, adopting budgets and accounts, and ratifying treaties. We need to encourage governments to ratify treaties and to ensure that they implement international treaties. It is very important, for example, that parliamentarians remember the need to monitor the implementation of the MDGs, including Objective 3 on enhancing the role of women.

Parliamentarians should ensure equality in parliaments; they have a key responsibility for promoting social justice, employment and equality of opportunity, and for combating discrimination. Public policies should guarantee all members of society equal access to public affairs, in accordance with their specific needs. Public policies should be supported by the State budget which of course is always debated and approved by parliaments, and the budget should reflect the needs of all. The budget should reflect the needs of all taxpayers as well as all the major economic and social needs of the country, its budgetary priorities and the key policies and strategies of the State.

“There are numerous examples of discrimination in terms of access to employment; working conditions; illiteracy, which mainly affects women, particularly in rural areas; maternal mortality, which again affects rural areas more than urban areas; and access to education.”

There are major disparities between rural and urban regions in terms of the way they benefit from public policies. Statistics from country to country demonstrate that rural communities are often the ones that suffer. There are also major imbalances between men and women. There are numerous examples of discrimination in terms of access to employment; working conditions; illiteracy, which mainly affects women, particularly in rural areas; maternal mortality, which again affects rural areas more than urban areas; and access to education. There is also the issue of the increasingly feminine character of poverty – women are far more likely to be poor than men. All these imbalances result from policies and programmes that fail to take gender considerations

into account. Making budgets more gender-responsive is therefore very important.

Gender has an impact on development. Women do not have the access to resources and power that men have. There is a major difference between the needs of women and those of men in terms of their roles and responsibilities, and this situation is a barrier to development because it restricts the opportunities for half the population. Some countries, such as France, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Mali, Senegal and Morocco, have adopted a new gender-based approach to budgeting, which responds to gender needs. This new gender-sensitive approach is a very important tool for improving equality.

The budgetary reforms in Morocco were based on a new results-oriented approach, which also improves partnership with civil society. The budget is drawn up on the basis of agreements between central government and local authorities. A principle of globalization credits introduces greater flexibility in terms of deciding the budget and helps to gauge the real impact of policies on men and women. These budgetary reforms are important for introducing a gender perspective and have gender equality as the key objective. Of course, the partnership with civil society also needs to be institutionalized. This approach is a participatory approach that takes the role of civil society into account. Civil society is particularly active in numerous areas, and this helps to compensate for the poor representation of women in public authorities at the local level. A Gender Report has been published by the Ministry of Finance in Morocco. The report analyses the impact of various policies on men and women, particularly in key areas such as education, health, agriculture and finance. An excellent guide for parliamentarians is published by the Ministry of Finance with the support of the United Nations Development Fund for Women.

The budgetary reforms are very promising in terms of their impact on increasing the effectiveness of public policies and overcoming deficiencies in human development policies. Parliamentarians have been called on to take action against inequalities by setting budget priorities but a number of obstacles remain – not least the poor level of representation of women in local, regional and national elected bodies. At the global level, only 17 per cent of parliamentarians are women despite the efforts made in a number of countries. Women are also absent from decision-making bodies in parliaments throughout the world. Women

parliamentarians are in a majority in many social bodies but it is extremely rare to find them in financial bodies, which are very important for women because such memberships would enable them to have an impact on the budget. There is also a need to set up networks of women parliamentarians at the national, regional and international levels to increase their influence. The IPU plays an important role in coordinating networks of women parliamentarians throughout the world.

I have a number of ideas to increase the influence of women parliamentarians. It is important to collect gender-specific data in all sectors because such data is often not available, which makes it very difficult to assess the real extent of discrimination against women. A strategy committee should be set up to discuss State policies, with government members, civil society and parliamentarians as participants. A highly participatory approach should be taken to identifying needs and distinguishing between the needs of women and men from different social backgrounds. Governments need to be encouraged to consult all stakeholders throughout the budget development process. Logistic support should also be given to strengthening the capacities of parliamentarians. Strategies need to be developed to improve the image of parliamentarians; for example, public hearings should take place in countries where this does not happen because they are a good way to improve the chances of women's demands being heard and civil

society being consulted. Partnerships also need to be set up with NGOs and with the media.

Training and awareness-raising on gender equality and the budget are very important. More men and women at the local level and in parliaments should be dealing with this. Awareness needs to be raised among different sectors: civil society, the media and in the universities. Strategies must be developed to enhance the role of women in parliaments – and in decision-making bodies in particular. The networks of women parliamentarians need to be strengthened – we need to strengthen their vision and strategies. Women parliamentarians should be encouraged to develop common strategies in parliaments. A new culture needs to be developed based on synergy and solidarity. Exchanges of experience and good practice at the international level, such as this, are extremely important.

In sum, we must remain convinced that the political and economic participation of women and gender equality are key to development. Progress for women means progress for everyone – even more so, of course, because the challenges of globalization mean that things are speeding up so we need to be as fast moving as possible. We need to use all of our energies and capacities together – both women and men parliamentarians. Together we can hope to see an improvement in the way our world is run – more just, more peaceful, more democratic, more equal and more humane. ■

The background of the slide is a light pinkish-red color. On the left side, there is a vertical strip showing a white radiator with vertical slats and a stack of white books. The main text is centered in the upper half of the slide.

**CHANGING PATTERNS OF WORK
IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT**

1

Overview and Debate

The first session examined trends in women's and men's participation in the labour market and the implications that these trends have for gender equality in today's global context. The discussion focused on the impacts of globalization, migration and demographic change, and of these trends on social and cultural challenges.

The panellists for the first part of the session were Dr. Barrientos, Institute for Development Policy and Management, University of Manchester; and Dr. Al Tenajji, Member of the Federal National Council, United Arab Emirates. Dr. Barrientos outlined the effects of global production networks on the feminization of labour in a globalized economy, addressed some of the challenges facing women workers in global production and detailed the role of some key actors in promoting women's rights. Dr. Al Tenajji narrowed the discussion by outlining the situation for women living and working in Gulf societies. She focused on five key issues: (1) the problems faced by women in the job market; (2) the ability of women in the Gulf to deal with present and future circumstances; (3) the benefits acquired by women through entering the job market; (4) compliance with sustainable human development standards; and (5) conceptualizing and implementing women's empowerment in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States.

The panellists for the second part of the session were Mr. Messenger, Senior Research Officer, Conditions of Work and Employment Program, International Labour Organization (ILO); and Ms. Carstairs, Senator, Parliament of Canada. Mr. Messenger detailed recent trends and changes in the global workforce, discussed the effect of such trends on the condition of women and proposed policies to combat inequality. Ms. Carstairs used the example of Canada to discuss the various challenges confronting women when they

attempt to enter the workforce for the first time, or re-enter it after taking time off to tend to family responsibilities.

The presentations outlined that in recent years there has been a noticeable transformation in global production markets. Dr. Barrientos explained that, largely due to **global drivers** such as economic liberalization and developments in information technology, trade, which has traditionally taken place in remote markets and been controlled predominately by market forces, is now increasingly coordinated through large companies. This has had both positive and negative effects on women's economic empowerment worldwide, regardless of whether they are integrated into the global export economy. Traditionally, women have been integrated into the global economy as producers, working mainly in the agriculture and garments industries. The commercialization of labour, including reproductive labour, which has accompanied globalization in recent years, has helped women to integrate as consumers. The increasing employment of women in global production networks has had a noticeable effect on the production of goods. According to Dr. Barrientos:

The presence of women can change dynamics and influence trends. Globalization is a gender issue: Globalization is women. The employment of women in production networks is thus not an add-on feature of globalization – it is a core dimension.

As employees, women are socially embedded in a gendered economy where they are employed as an increasingly mobile, cost-efficient and casualized workforce.

Dr. Al Tenajji outlined some of the **benefits** that increased integration has had for women in the Gulf

States. Earning a wage has enabled some women to become more financially independent, while allowing them to gain self-respect and in self-confidence. These are crucial accomplishments for women living in strong patriarchal societies. Most important, perhaps, is the political empowerment that women can achieve through entering the job market. Dr. Al Tenaiji stated,

There is a strong relationship between a woman's work, the enhancement of the political empowerment process and the increase in the quantitative and qualitative level of the representation of women in leading decision-making posts in the Gulf States.

Dr. Barrientos pointed out that while the integration of women has increased, this has not occurred in a regular and well-protected manner. From the perspective of a decent work agenda, there are still **major inequalities** between men and women in the processes and the 'pyramid' structure of global production networks. Despite recent progress, the regular workforce is still predominantly male and there is an overwhelming concentration of women in the informal sector. Socially embedded discrimination as well as insecurity and lack of protection are thus still major challenges.

The situation in the GCC States is an example of how socially embedded discrimination may prevent many women from entering the job market. Dr. Al Tenaiji emphasized that prevailing **social dimensions**, such as "negative values or attitudes" which emphasize women's commitments to the family rather than to a profession, provide a bigger barrier to women attempting to enter the job market than legal or administrative factors. According to Dr. Al Tenaiji, traditional mindsets often make it difficult to adapt in the ways required by globalization and, in particular, the revolution in telecommunications.

The law may also act as a barrier to women entering the job market. Dr. Al Tenaiji pointed out that the **implementation and execution of labour laws** may still act as a barrier even if legislation conforms to international standards. There is also a lack of awareness among women about labour law and the rights and duties afforded to women by those laws. A lack of education, unsuitable working conditions and bureaucratic administrative procedures are among the other barriers faced by women in the GCC States.

Employee protection has traditionally been channelled through the employer, but in a globalized economy with low employer attachment the employer is no longer the most effective protector. This is especially true for workers in the non-regular employment sector, who must find new ways of protecting their rights. In response to the challenges outlined above, Dr. Barrientos emphasized the importance of trade unions in offering protection to employees in the informal sector.

The focus moved on to how to enhance the voice of women workers to ensure that they receive the **protection** they need in order to participate fully in the global economy. First, greater acknowledgement is needed of women's production and reproductive roles. Second, trade unions should be more community-based and develop innovative approaches to reaching the most vulnerable. Third, voluntary initiatives, such as consumer-led civil society campaigns, should be encouraged in order to raise awareness of women's roles in the global economy. Similarly, a strengthening of government regulation is essential to enhancing the rights of women workers and guaranteeing suitable working conditions. In order to ensure that global drivers are properly addressed, the strengthening of government regulation should be a collaborative process of alliance building based on international initiatives. Dr. Al Tenaiji emphasized the need for an integrative approach to overcoming the barriers facing women. Such an approach should empower women by providing basic services, such as education and health care, as well as enabling easy access to resources. It should also seek to combat societal traditions, beliefs and practices that inhibit women's development. As Dr. Al Tenaiji stated:

The concept of women's empowerment indicates the process of enhancing and supporting women's capabilities and enforcing their reality by escalating participation in development aspects and recognizing the duties and obligations, as well as providing the cultural, financial, moral and educational means to empower women's participation in decision making and resource allocation at the levels of family and public life.

Mr. Messenger outlined five closely linked **general trends** in the changes to the global workforce. The first, a positive trend, is the increase in the number of women in the paid workforce across the

world. The extent to which women participate in the labour market is, however, counterbalanced by a second trend which identifies women workers as those who still perform the vast majority of unpaid work, domestic tasks and care work. There has been a further trend for diversification in contract types, which has resulted in an increasing number of women being employed on short-term contracts. This trend has further segmented the workforce and resulted in a loss of job security for women across the world.

“Since work flexibility is rare in the formal sector, women have increasingly turned to jobs in the informal economy that allow them to balance their family responsibilities while earning a wage.”

Moreover, the past decade has witnessed a fourth broad trend for increases in wages, which has not led to more equality because the pay gap between men and women has decreased in only a few states. As far as working conditions are concerned, a fifth trend indicates that official working hours have decreased in the direction of 40 hours per week. This improvement, however, has been accompanied by an increasing reliance on overtime. This trend frequently disadvantages women who, because of a lack of flexible working arrangements and child care facilities, are often forced to work in part-time jobs with fewer paid hours in order to balance the burden of their unpaid work, such as their commitment to a family, with the need to earn an income. Since work flexibility is rare in the formal sector, women have increasingly turned to jobs in the informal economy that allow them to balance their family responsibilities while earning a wage. In these cases, however, they often work in poor conditions with little or no social protection. Ms. Carstairs emphasized how this discrimination against women persists even in retirement years as pension schemes are often based on the number of hours worked throughout a career.

The trend for short-term contracts, increased amounts of overtime and deteriorating working conditions has reduced the productivity of companies as well as the opportunities available for women. Mr. Messenger stated that because all the trends are closely

linked, any policies to improve working conditions must also be linked to ensure that improvements in one area do not translate into losses in another.

This assessment was echoed by Ms. Carstairs, who highlighted the changing dynamic of the workforce due to social factors such as demographic change, lower birth rates, delays in marriage and changing social attitudes. In Canada, the size of the country makes it difficult to implement and oversee nationwide reforms. Moreover, there is still a social stigma attached to women in Canadian politics who are frequently criticized for their voice as well as their appearance.

According to Ms. Carstairs, “Despite the introduction of women into the workforce, transformations in the structure of the employment market have failed to keep pace with globalized trends.” Several studies have confirmed the beneficial effect that the presence of women can have on decision-making bodies. Yet, in general, the skills women have are not being properly recognized, and although there has been a significant increase in the past decade in the number of women at managerial level, women managers are still largely confined to employment in the public sector. In this regard, work routines must be reformed to give women access to the jobs for which they have the ability and the skills. Women are still the primary caregivers, so more must be done to improve childcare facilities to help them to re-enter the workforce after childbirth.

Crucially, any policy aimed at tackling gender inequalities must recognize the prevalence of **discrimination and sexual harassment** in the workplace. In this regard, legislation is in itself insufficient for providing women with the security they require to carry out their jobs. Positive action must be taken accompanied by effective remedies which allow women to speak out against instances of discrimination or harassment without fearing the loss of their job.

Plenary Debate

Much of the debate focused on an elaboration of the **challenges facing women**, from a national perspective, as they enter the job market. In this regard, participants from Italy and Bahrain reiterated Dr. Al Tenajji’s concerns regarding the lack of legal awareness among women workers. Bahrain further underscored the crucial role that parliamentarians

have to play in ensuring that both men and women are well informed of their rights and duties so that they have the capacity to adjust their practices in conformity with international standards. Although it was stated that **legislative support** is a precondition for progress, other representatives argued that legislation alone is not enough to ensure de facto progress. Burkina Faso pointed to the widening gap between legislation and implementation in several countries and suggested that parliamentarians should exercise more of a supervisory function in order to oversee the implementation of laws after their adoption. The need for temporary positive discrimination measures to help women break through the “glass ceiling” was also mentioned, as was the need for parliamentarians to dedicate more time and resources to capacity building and training.

In order to combat the roots of inequality and target the most vulnerable, it was suggested that the **decent work agenda** should do more to address the socio-economic barriers preventing women from entering the job market, rather than focus only on legislation. In India, for example, the National Employment Strategy (2001) takes a micro-policy approach which recognizes the role of women as both producers and consumers. In doing so, it hopes to increase socio-economic development, particularly in urban areas where an overwhelming majority of women are employed in the informal sector.

Most participants felt that there had been a generally positive trend for the **integration of women** into the labour market, but that this progress has been both unsustainable and limited in scope. Italy was referred to as an example of a country in which the processes of democratization and economic liberalization can be clearly seen, but where these have not been translated into consistent improvements for women workers. Similarly, women in India are starting to dominate the textile industry but finding it much harder to participate in the private sector, and in Benin women are largely confined to the domestic sphere. Cross-cutting policies should therefore

be adopted that can be applied to all employment sectors. Mr. Messenger made reference to ‘part-time reversibility’ and ‘time banking’ schemes as two examples of innovative models used to overcome the challenges facing women.

It emerged from the discussion that the **exclusion of women** from the formal sector is the result of a combination of factors including: poverty and lack of health care; poor education; the persistence of violence against women in the workplace; discriminatory cultural traditions; and economic liberalization leading to the creation of predominantly female economic migrants. The need to address the concerns of economic migrants illustrates the importance of adopting a cross-cutting approach that engages all levels of society and transcends national boundaries. Dr. Barrientos underscored the importance of building alliances between the local, national and global levels. In line with these recommendations, the Italian representative stated that:

Together, the ILO and the IPU can do a lot in a general context. We need to be able to tap the synergy between countries and people, the existing agreements between governments, workers and employers, the ILO agreements and the work in the IPU to enhance cooperation and show us the way forward.

Dr. Al Tenaiji reminded delegates that the achievement of gender equality in today’s globalized context is a long-term process that requires a commitment on behalf of all states to internationally agreed standards. International organizations have a critical role to play in developing tools and guidelines, as well as making recommendations to help parliamentarians implement legislation and fulfil their treaty obligations. Although much has yet to be done, Ms. Carstairs ended the discussion on a positive note by stating that solutions exist for the problems in every country, as long as there is the political commitment and the political will. ■

Women and Work: The Global Dimension

Dr. Stephanie Ware Barrientos

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This presentation provides an overview of global factors that affect and impact on women's participation in the global economy. There are many drivers of women's integration into the global economy and it is important to take them into consideration when exploring national strategies to address women's integration. The specific challenges that women workers face also need to be examined, together with those who can participate in that process.

There is no doubt that global transformation is under way. That transformation has been driven by a number of factors, particularly advances in information technology, communication and transport, export liberalization and economic liberalization (which most countries have been involved in), deregulation of labour markets (which has facilitated more flexible labour markets into which women have been increasingly integrated) and the feminization of employment.

There has been a lot of research and this process has been well documented. What needs to be highlighted is that women are affected whether they are integrated directly into the global export economy or not. They are also affected by globalization simply through imports and through the changing ways in which domestic economies are being affected. In terms of numbers, there is a significant level of female employment in export production, particularly in garments (80 per cent); in waged labour in agriculture, and particularly agribusiness; and in export processing zones, and nearly half of all economic migrants are women.

Clearly, women are being integrated into the global economy in ways that have similarities and differences to men, which highlights the fact that globalization is a gender issue. This issue is not about globalization and women; globalization integrally involves women, and one needs to examine why that process is taking place.

Globalization of the global economy entails significant changes in the way global economic interactions take place. Traditionally, trade took place between nation states as remote markets where intermediaries would facilitate trade based on supply and demand and market forces, with possible interventions through trade policy. Increasingly, global interactions and economic interactions are coordinated through large dominant companies or agents of companies, both at the global level and increasingly at the regional and national levels. For instance, UNCTAD estimates that two thirds of world trade is now either intra-firm trade, i.e. trade within a large conglomerate of firms, or coordinated trade, where there is direct coordination between firms. This results in the globalization of production and a division of labour between countries as they participate in these global production networks.

A key factor – and one which is downplayed – is that much of this issue is linked to the commercialization of reproductive labour. A lot of the new activities which firms are engaged in, the types of production and the types of exports are either the production or export of goods that were traditionally produced by women in the home, for example, garment production. This is also true of the food sector where much of food exports involves the processing and exporting of food that is traditionally produced either on the family farm or in the home.

It is the commercialization of reproductive labour in the sense that, as women are becoming integrated into the global economy, both as waged workers, as producers, but also as consumers, they are also changing the dynamics of that economy, in terms of the types of products that they consume, the types of products that they buy and the influence that they have on economic processes. Women's waged employ-

ment is leading to an increase in purchasing power among women, and companies that coordinate global production are very aware of that, because they know that these are the potential markets that they need to tap into.

Employment of women is being integrated into the process of globalization. The result is that women's waged work is not just taking place as an add-on, but is being integrated as a core dimension of this changing global economy. Women are employed flexibly, which helps to keep costs down; they are very important in terms of the quality of output, because both quantity and quality matter; they are often very mobile, especially mobile between home and waged work and they are increasingly important as consumers too.

“Yet integration of women into the global economy is not taking place in an equal way, or on a level playing field, and certainly not in the way that men were traditionally integrated into waged employment in past decades.”

Therefore, effectively, global production networks are socially embedded in a gender economy. Yet integration of women into the global economy is not taking place in an equal way, or on a level playing field, and certainly not in the way that men were traditionally integrated into waged employment in past decades. Increasingly, there has emerged a work pyramid where at the top there is a core regular workforce, predominantly male, varying by sector, within many predominantly male sectors, which is relatively well protected, relatively well organized, and has a relatively high level of rights.

Global production is expanding, based on drawing in a large, casual, flexible, lower-cost labour force, much of which is female. If one examines the pyramid, there is what is called the “sea level”. Above the “sea level” is the protected labour force, the formal labour force, and below the “sea level” is the more casualized, flexible labour force, and this is where women are concentrated, this is where there are poorer working conditions, fewer rights, and less protection. Below the “sea level” there are many categories of employment, all the way down to women own-account

workers, working in households, who can also be integrated indirectly into global production in one way or another. This is the issue or challenge that must be addressed.

From the perspective of the Decent Work Agenda – particularly important now that decent work has been integrated into the Millennium Development Goals – and from the employment angle, the employment challenge consists of the fact that women are being integrated into development, but are often not being integrated into better jobs that are regular and well protected. A major challenge for governments and national bodies is the fact that a lot of the drivers of the new employment for women are global buyers and global companies, operating from outside the national economy within which that waged work is taking place. That presents a major challenge because if regulation exists only at the national level, in isolation from the external global drivers, the problems of employment or the issues that women face will not necessarily be addressed.

The second major challenge is the protection challenge. Protection for regular workers in most countries has traditionally been channelled through the employer, with increased flexibility of employment and mobility of employment. The employer as the key channel becomes less effective as a means of ensuring that workers are protected. Therefore, new ways of protecting workers, particularly women workers, given that they are concentrated in non-regular employment, need to be devised.

Third is the “rights and voice” challenge, where women are often not traditionally represented in trade unions, in parliament, and in other legislative and decision-making bodies, which would enable them to influence this kind of change. The question is how to increase representation particularly as these bodies are often constrained in their ability to address gender issues.

Regarding the empowerment of women workers, questions remain as to how to enhance their voice and their participation. There has to be a greater acknowledgement of the fact that women are both combining productive and reproductive roles and, therefore, simply focusing on the workplace is insufficient. A number of trade unions are evolving strategies: they are beginning to organize at the local community level in order to reach women workers based in different workplaces. This is quite a new and innovative approach which needs to be developed

and extended if the aim is to genuinely reach and address the issues that face women workers, not just in terms of their wage work but also juggling that with childcare and other pressures.

There are pressures on those same global buyers insofar as they need to play a role in addressing poor working conditions and issues that women workers face in their supply chains in different countries. In addition, there are a number of consumer-led campaigns and civil society-led campaigns in relation to global buyers and these are having some interesting effects in terms of creating alliances between global buyers and local civil society organizations in different countries. Some of these initiatives involve com-

panies, trade unions, NGOs and, in some places, governments as well.

Lastly, there is the issue of government regulation. Government regulation of labour is essential in terms of enhancing the rights of women workers. The issue in the global economy is how to strengthen those rights, given the reality of the situation in which many women work. That has to be done by building alliances at the different levels, including at the community level with voluntary initiatives and with regulatory bodies, labour inspectorates, and so on. Those alliances can only be built through much wider national initiatives that can begin to address the challenges women face. ■

Equality of Work Opportunities between Men and Women in the Gulf Cooperation Council States

Dr. Nedal Mohammed Al Tenaiji

Member of the Federal National Council,
United Arab Emirates

Introduction

This presentation discusses a number of challenges related to equal opportunities in employment for men and women in the Gulf societies under five headings: 1. the problems faced by working women in the job market; 2. the ability of women in the Gulf to deal with the present and future requirements of the job market; 3. the benefits acquired by Gulf women through entering the job market; 4. the extent to which the Gulf States comply with the sustainable human development standards; and 5. the concept of women's empowerment and the extent of its implementation in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States. The paper also assesses the prospects for increasing the work-related opportunities of women in the Gulf.

1. The problems faced by working women in the job market

The legal dimension of women's employment in the Gulf

A review of the articles contained in the constitutions and by-laws of the Gulf States shows that they all recognize the following rights and principles:

- The principle of equality – all the constitutions acknowledge equality of rights and obligations between men and women and confirm that they are all equal before the law;
- The right to hold public office – the constitutions place no restriction on women holding public office;
- The right to employment – the constitutions stipulate that the state shall guarantee job opportunities to nationals of either sex on equal terms and without discrimination.

The labour laws in all the States have a dedicated chapter on women's employment. There are many points in common between these laws, primarily:

- It is not permissible for women to work at night unless the nature of a specific job makes this essential;
- Working women have the right to maternity leave and it is not permissible to lay them off during such leave.
- Women are prohibited from employment in hazardous industries and trades.
- Equality of remuneration between men and women carrying out the same job is stipulated in the Kuwaiti, UAE and Qatari labour laws.

A review of the civil service laws of the Gulf States shows that they agree on many procedures and rights regarding working women, namely:

- Employment rules and procedures are not biased against women. Gender is not deemed a condition for holding public office and men are not given priority in this matter;
- All the civil service laws confirm that competence and seniority are the main criteria for promotion;
- All the civil service laws entitle working women to maternity leave, although the length of time to which they are entitled differs from one Gulf state to the other.

The social security and insurance laws agree on the right of working women to a pension but the period of employment that entitles them to a pension and the value of that pension differ between Gulf States.

Gulf women enjoy those rights stipulated in the international labour conventions. The International

Labour Organization (ILO) has issued twelve conventions primarily or secondarily related to working women. They are divided into two types: general conventions aimed at promoting the principle of equality and at eliminating all forms of discrimination at work; and conventions addressing specific issues regarding working women.

The labour and civil service laws in the GCC States conform to the international standards on working women's rights such as the right to hold public office and to be promoted, as well as the right to suitable working conditions and environmental standards.¹

The extent to which the law restrains Gulf women's employment

The law itself does not stand in the way of women's participation in the job market. It is the implementation and execution of these laws that hinder women's employment – especially in some of the private sector corporations where the low wages that women sometimes earn are often accompanied by long hours, and where no consideration is given to health conditions relating to pregnancy or to maternity leave. The working woman's lack of awareness of her own employment rights and obligations influences her career progress and occupational security. Consequently, her rights are compromised and she cannot get access to the benefits provided by the law.

The social dimensions that influence Gulf women entering the job market

Certain negative values and attitudes prevail in some families regarding the importance of women's employment. These categorize jobs according to social customs that bear no relation to biological differences between men and women. These values are usually transmitted through the socialization process, which may be biased against women's employment. The increased family commitments of married working women influence their desire to work.

The influence of working conditions on women entering the job market

Women face a number of factors relating to vocational training and the work environment that prevent them from entering the job market and adversely affect

their productivity at work. The work environment in private sector corporations can have certain characteristics that reduce women's job opportunities, such as low wages, slow promotion, long hours, shift systems and a lack of segregation of the sexes. There is a low level of occupational mobility for women in certain private or public corporations as a result of slow and limited promotion opportunities. There is also a scarcity of studies on working women, especially field studies, which diagnose the reality of the working environment and provide adequate solutions for the problems they face.

Administrative and procedural dimensions that hinder women's employment in small and medium-sized businesses

Many women prefer to work in the private sector by starting diverse small or medium-sized businesses. They face many difficulties in establishing these businesses, including the routine bureaucratic procedures for obtaining trade licences, the lack of experience and training of some women in the field of small or medium-sized businesses and the high financial costs of setting up such businesses. In order to overcome the financing problem, many Gulf States have taken numerous initiatives to support the young men and women and encourage them to start their own business, such as the Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Program for Supporting the Youth in Entering the Business World, and the Sheikh Khalifa Fund for Supporting Small and Medium-Scale Enterprises.

In sum

There are no constitutional or legal obstacles to the employment of women in the GCC countries and their constitutions guarantee a number of rights for working women in line with the international labour conventions, based on the principle of citizenship which recognizes equal rights in various realms of life for all members of the society. There are some real obstacles to women entering the private job market, such as the long working hours and low wages in certain private corporations. The lack of legal awareness of the working woman is regarded as a major obstacle to obtaining the benefits provided by the labour laws and becoming acquainted with her rights and duties at work.

2. The ability of women in the Gulf to deal with the present and future requirements of the job market

Gulf women face many challenges in the job market. The number of job opportunities offered to women is increasing with the figures for the working population in the Gulf States. The rate of participation in the workforce by women is expected to rise, which obliges them to improve their vocational training and education in order to adapt to the job market and increase their job opportunities. This is particularly important because there will be fierce competition in the future with the next generation of young people entering the job market. The rate of young people entering the job market is expected to increase annually by three per cent over the next decade.

The repercussions of globalization are felt in the Gulf States through their accession to the World Trade Organization and the signing of Free Trade Agreements with different countries of the world. This has increased the number of job opportunities offered to women. There is an important role for the higher education institutions in providing women in the Gulf with qualifications focusing on the specializations in which the Gulf States enjoy relative competitive advantage, such as petrochemicals, banking, insurance and tourist services, as well as some aspects of knowledge-based industries related to the development of the medical, engineering and agricultural sciences and other technologies. The openness of the job markets in the Gulf may present a number of challenges. Gulf governments must start and extend training and vocational programmes directed at providing women with qualifications that meet the requirements of the job market.

The adverse effects of globalization on the job opportunities available to Gulf nationals must be studied where these result in a decrease in the manpower required for some specialized jobs. All GCC States' citizens, men and women, suffer from the unequal competition with the migrant labour force, the size of which increases annually in the Gulf job markets. If the Gulf governments fail to impose strict measures for organizing the job market and to make the transition to the most highly competitive sectors, unskilled migrant labour will increase in number and have better job opportunities than those offered to the Gulf nationals.

The number of female university graduates seeking employment has risen for many reasons, but primarily because of their inability to concur with the requirements of certain jobs in the market. This is because of the lack of comprehensive education strategies linking education to the different aspects of socio-economic development in the Gulf societies, as well as the absence of professional orientation for general secondary education students, which leads female students to study scientific specializations that the job market does not need.

In sum

If Gulf women obtain appropriate training opportunities, they will concur better with present and future job market requirements and will be in a strong competitive position with men for many jobs in the public and private sectors. The Gulf governments must take into consideration the developments that will be witnessed by the Gulf economies in the future when setting out education strategies, and encourage women students to join tertiary and applied faculties.

The greater openness of the Gulf economies as well as the increase in economic development and the amount of expatriate labour required are seen as some of the main factors that affect the amount and type of job opportunities available to women. Consequently, the Gulf governments will have to impose stricter measures to organize the job market in such a way as to maintain job opportunities for Gulf nationals.

3. The benefits acquired by Gulf women through entering the job market

Gulf women entering the job market raises many questions about the feasibility and importance of their work in societies that are achieving economic development and in which the individual is receiving a good share of total gross domestic product. The value of Gulf women's work and their motivation to work are not limited to financial factors such as providing a source of income and improving the living standards of the household. There is also a moral factor as work increases self-confidence, contributes to autonomy and ensures personal security as women become less financially reliant on others;

the wish for women to serve their country and contribute to qualitative changes in the development course of their society; and the benefits derived from the higher educational qualifications and the education and training opportunities offered.

The relationship between women’s work and political empowerment

There is a strong relationship between a woman’s work, the enhancement of the political empowerment process and the increase in the quantitative and qualitative levels of the representation of women in leading decision-making posts in the Gulf States. Paid employment allows women to acquire the financial and knowledge resources and potential required by political candidates for their election campaigns. Moreover, any position held allows women to learn about their role in serving society.

In addition to the economic factor, there are other factors that have helped Gulf women to take on leadership roles and political office in recent years, including the vision of political leaders regarding the importance of women’s empowerment, the family and social contacts of the candidates and their educational qualifications.

In sum

Political empowerment is seen as one of the major benefits acquired by Gulf women through work. The percentage of women at ministerial level in the Gulf States is: Oman, 10 per cent; the UAE, 5.6 per cent; Qatar, 7.7 per cent; and Bahrain, 8.7 per cent. The percentage of parliamentary seats held by women is: UAE, 22.5 per cent; Bahrain, 2.5 per cent in the lower

house and 25 per cent in the upper house; and Oman, 0 per cent in the lower house and 15.5 per cent in the upper house. The percentage of women high-ranking officials and directors in Oman is 9 per cent; in Saudi Arabia it is 31 per cent; in the UAE it is 30 per cent; and in Qatar it is 8 per cent.

The work of Gulf women has increased recognition by men of the role of women in society and caused Gulf society to increase its trust in their work and ability to actively contribute to society. Despite what is generally said about working women having some adverse effects on family life and child rearing, these effects are in fact limited. Working women in the Gulf can always maintain the balance between family and job commitments, which is something many other women across the world find much harder to achieve.

4. The limitations of GCC Countries’ commitments to standards of sustainable human development

Sustainable human resource development aims to expand people’s choices and capabilities by forming social capital which is utilized in an optimum way to satisfy the needs of current generations without jeopardizing the needs of future generations. The United Nations Human Development Reports outline the progress or lack of progress achieved in different countries around the world in the field of sustainable human resource development. Currently, these reports measure nations’ achievement of the targets of the Millennium Development Goals the third of which is concerned with supporting the concept of equality between genders and empowering women.

Table 1: Some Indicators in the GCC Countries in the Human Development Report, 2007/2008

Country	Human development index rank (global)	Life expectancy at birth in years (2005)	Rate of illiteracy among those aged 15 and above, 1995–2005	Ratio of individual share from the Gross National Product (equal to PPP in USD 2005)
Kuwait	33	77.3	93.3	26.3
Qatar	35	75.0	89.0	27.6
UAE	39	78.3	88.7	25.5
Bahrain	41	75.2	86.5	21.4
Oman	58	75.0	81.4	15.6
Saudi Arabia	61	72.2	82.9	15.7

Source: Human Development Report 2007/2008, The United Nations Development Programme

According to the 2007/2008 Report, the GCC countries achieved considerable progress in the field of human resource development in general, with all the GCC countries grouped in the countries with high quality human resource development programmes. Enhancements to the services and facilities provided to the citizens of the GCC countries are provided with absolutely no reference to gender.

The education services provided to women in the GCC States are a good measure of the progress achieved in the human resources development process because education is directly connected to women's empowerment and their occupying leadership positions. All the GCC countries constitutions assure education for all with no gender discrimination. In elementary school, all the GCC countries take major steps to reduce the education gap between genders. In elementary schools the percentage of girls to boys exceeds 90 per cent in all the GCC countries.

In high school, all six GCC countries could bridge the education gap between sexes, where now the percentage of girls in high school is between 55 per cent and 85 per cent. All the statistics indicate that equality has been achieved between sexes in university education in all the GCC countries. The percentage of women exceeds men in Qatar, Kuwait and the UAE.

Results

The six GCC countries succeeded in achieving high levels of human development and are classified in the countries with high human development ratios worldwide. GCC women benefit from their governments' policies and application of sustainable human resource development standards, which are based on the constitutional principles of these countries where women enjoy many services such as education, health care and work opportunities.

5. The concept of women's empowerment and the extent of its implementation in the Gulf Cooperation Council States

The concept of women's empowerment indicates the process of enhancing and supporting women's capabilities and enforcing their reality by escalating participation in development aspects and recognizing the duties and obligations, as well as providing the cultural, financial, moral and educational means to empower women's participation in decision making and resource allocation at the levels of family and public life.

There are five levels at which women's empowerment is measured, and applying these levels to the GCC countries highlights the GCC governments' approach towards women's empowerment in all its aspects.

At the *basic services level*, women's empowerment is demonstrated through the education and health care services provided, as is demonstrated above.

Ease of access to resources: Women in the GCC countries enjoy financial independence in all their dealings with banks and financial institutes. They have the right to own or obtain all the elements and resources required for work and production such as land, loans, labour and services.

The awareness and understanding process: this level is concerned with fighting the traditions, beliefs and practices that restrain women's development and capabilities. When applying this level to the GCC countries, it is noticeable that women succeed in fighting many of the social traditions and norms that restrain their progress and participation in many of their communities' achievements. This has contributed to getting rid of many negative and backward traditions and norms.

Control over decision making: this level focuses on achieving equilibrium stability between men and

Table 2: Women's Participation in the Government Workforce in the GCC Countries

Country	Male	Female	Total	Total % of Females
Kuwait (Kuwaiti workforce – 15 years and more – in 2007)	177 038	134 470	311 508	43.1
Qatar (Qataris' workers in 2007)	21 319	18 687	38 010	49.1
UAE (Emiratis working in government and federal ministries in 2006)	5 570	1 865	7 435	25.0
Oman (Omanis working in the civil service in 2007)	55 808	32 817	88 625	37.0
Saudi Arabia (Saudi workforce – 15 years and more – in 2006)	3 230 201	670 388	3 900 589	17.1

women so that neither may dominate. Applying this level to the GCC countries, women have succeeded in obtaining men's respect and trust. This was accomplished through the achievements of women in education and work, which improved men's attitudes.

The *participation level* is based on women's empowerment through their ability to establish and manage economic projects. There were approximately 45,000 business women in the GCC countries in 2006, with an overall level of wealth of 37 billion USD.

Changes in population size and the size of the national workforce must be considered when measuring GCC women's contribution to the government workforces, where GCC countries vary in this aspect.

Conclusion

The GCC countries are working to encourage women's participation in all aspects and at all levels of the government and this empowerment varies according to the domestic environment, such as the historical background, the political leadership's vision of women's empowerment and the social and economic circumstances. In the future, there must be a concentration on women's empowerment at the levels of awareness and understanding since enforcing positive values and the approaches towards women's status will support women's empowerment at all the other levels.

A future vision to support GCC women's work opportunities: Supporting the work opportunities of women in the GCC and enhancing their chances at work are directly linked to many issues, the most important of which are:

- *Education Strategies*, either in schools or higher education, must be designed according to work market requirements. These strategies must take account of the expected future developments that the GCC countries' economies might witness, which depend on modern technologies and industrial innovations based on capital collaboration. This will require directing students towards the specializations demanded by the future work market.
- The *media* in the GCC countries must cover working women's issues and spread positive values about the role and importance of work for women. The media must contribute to the development of such values in GCC communities to overcome

the classic image of GCC women which some of the media carry.

- *Women's economic and civil community organizations*, such as the business women's councils, can support women's work by sponsoring education and training programmes to encourage women's participation in private sector economic projects. This can be accomplished through conferences and symposiums that discuss working women's issues in the GCC, or by establishing funds to finance women's economic projects. These councils can participate in international specialized networks that contribute by exchanging experiences in the field of business and women's recruitment.
- The *international specialist business organizations* contribute through training programmes to developing working women's skills, introducing them to work market changes and qualifying her to adapt to these changes. This issue requires cooperation between the United Nations specialized international organizations, such as the ILO, and the GCC governments to carry out such programmes in the best interests of women in the GCC countries.

To Support this future vision, a number of issues require debate and deliberation:

- The relation between the concept of sustainable human resource development and the availability of work opportunities for women;
- The application of standards of sustainable human resource development in GCC women's qualification and training programmes, as well as providing women with a psychologically and socially healthy and stable atmosphere may increase the level of women's participation in GCC countries' job markets;
- The role of social organizations is fundamental to spreading awareness among diverse social categories of the importance of women's participation in the permanent development process and as a real and effective partner in all production operations of society, especially after the increase in the proportion of women in GCC government leadership positions and entering the fields of commerce and investment; and
- How globalization can help in producing new work opportunities for women in the GCC countries and support their political empowerment.

Globalization, in its different aspects, provides GCC women with exceptional work opportunities, which were previously limited to men due to qualification requirements and the training and potential needed for such positions where women had to get past some unacceptable traditional and cultural values to fit the skills required for such positions. Globalization may provide certain perspectives for working women in the GCC countries about their role in the local community and consequently may produce real work opportunities with standards quite close to the cultures of the GCC communities and its functional values.

Globalization may play a part in changing some of the local work laws and enforcing women's participation in the job market and empowering her presence in leadership positions, especially in the light of the fact that legislation and regulations in the GCC countries do not discriminate between women and men in employment for any positions in general and leadership positions in particular. Globalization may encourage the evolution of job market standards and policies in the GCC countries that match international standards and are measured according to qualifications, experience and the ability to contribute quality with no respect to gender.

To what extent can the concept of women's empowerment contribute to increasing the percentage of GCC women in the workforce?

Many work opportunities are controlled by men, and this requires enforcement of "equality of opportunity" concepts for both men and women in the processes of sustainable development and women's empower-

ment. This can be accomplished by integrating this concept into school curricula and increasing awareness using different mass media methods.

The empowerment methods that the GCC governments currently provide, such as training, providing qualifications and facilitating the job market to empower women politically and socially requires educating women about such policies and enlightening them about their rights and duties towards the community. The interest in field studies and scientific research related to evaluating women's qualifications and capabilities leads to individual and social appreciation of women's roles, which will enhance women's political empowerment in the future.

To what extent can government policies contribute to specifying certain shares for women in the job market? As a result of some government policies in the GCC countries regarding women's localization in the private sector, it will be quite difficult to impose gender-based shares on local job markets. Some observers may see these government policies as discrimination against men and their work opportunities. ■

Endnotes

- 1 The conventions are: The Convention No. (89) Concerning Night Work (Revised), 1948 – Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi, UAE – and The Convention No. (100) Concerning Equal Remuneration of 1951 – Saudi Arabia, UAE – and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) adopted in 1979 – Article (11) – sets out the appropriate procedures and steps to eliminate discrimination against women at work – has been entered into by all Gulf States except Qatar. These states have had reservations about articles (2), (7), (9), (15), (16), and (29).

Changing Patterns in the World of Work: Women, Men and Working Conditions

Mr. Jon C. Messenger

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This presentation provides an overview of globalization in working and employment conditions. The primary focus is working time and work organization, and a discussion of changing patterns in the world of work, in terms of women, men, their working conditions and how it is all evolving in the context of globalization.

Starting very broadly with the global workforce, there has been a really significant increase in the number of women in the paid workforce across the world. According to a recent International Labour Organization (ILO) study, between 1993 and 2003 the total number of women in the global workforce increased by 20 per cent – from 1.0 to 1.2 billion workers. There have been particularly significant increases in Latin American countries such as Bolivia, Colombia and Paraguay.

However, in spite of this increase in paid work participation by women, women still perform the vast majority of unpaid work – domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning and other household responsibilities – as well as care work – not only for children but also for ageing parents and members of the family who are sick. This can limit the extent of participation in the paid labour force; it is not strictly women's participation per se, but the extent of their participation in terms of part-time work and also work in the informal economy.

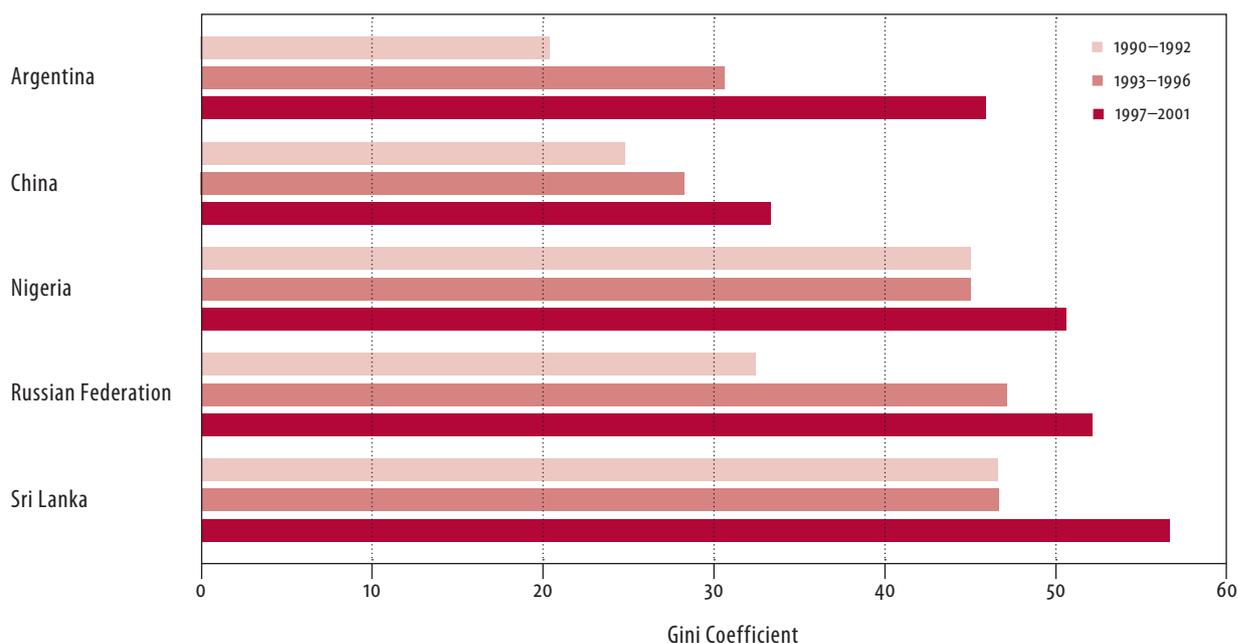
The Conditions of Work and Employment Programme at the ILO covers the entire range of subjects relating to working and employment conditions. The first thing that everyone wants to talk about is money: wages and incomes. In broad global terms there has been an increase in wages and incomes, with *some* decrease in the gender wage gap. There is a global trend towards real wage increases especially in developing regions that are emerging as major

exporters such as: China, with real wage growth of 100 per cent between 1990 to 2002; Chile, with real wage growth of 46.6 per cent over the same period; and Malaysia, which has seen consistent growth in real wages of about 3.5 per cent per year over a long period. There has also been *some* progress in reducing the gender wage gap, which remains persistent and very stubborn nonetheless. In Latin America, for example, the difference in hourly pay between men and women decreased from 32 to 22 percentage points between 1990 and 2000.

So, the overall trend has been for increasing wages and, at the same time, reducing gender inequality. However, using the Gini coefficient (where zero represents perfect equality and 100 represents absolute inequality in terms of wages) and taking a number of countries, selected at random to represent a diverse group in terms of geographic location, a general trend is evident between the early 1990s and 2001, the most recent period for which we have data, of increasing wages but a rising Gini coefficient in countries around the world, which is worrying because increasing wages are occurring simultaneously with increasing income inequality.

You also see diversifying types of employment: the kinds of labour contracts that are being used in different places are becoming more diverse, and this is making a workforce already divided into a primary and secondary labour force even more segmented. There are a lot more distinctions in 2007, particularly within the secondary labour force. A lot has been written about the end of the standard contract or the permanent job, particularly in developed countries where a standard full-time permanent contract existed for many workers. This is not a particularly new phenomenon, but what is new are the kinds of non-standard employment – the kinds of part-time,

Figure 1: Wage Inequality in Selected Countries



Source: WIDER and World Bank PovcalNet

temporary contracts that are available. An increasing proportion of the labour market is made up of fixed-term contracts of one to two years, or even of less than one year; short-term contracts; and temporary agency work, which is increasing substantially in many countries from a low base. In South Korea, for instance, which is a newly industrialized country, the proportion of non-standard workers actually jumped nearly 10 percentage points between 2001 and 2006, from 26.8 per cent to 35.5 cent, using a conservative definition – it could even be considered higher than that.

In terms of working hours, working time and work organization, there is an overall trend for a move towards a 40-hour normal working week, although there are still many workers working much longer hours. There has been a gradual movement towards a 40-hour legal limit on working hours, in national laws and collective agreements over the past four decades. This is a really significant move away from the previously dominant 48-hour working week in most countries, and towards the 40-hour working week which has existed in many developed countries for a long time. Increasingly, many developing countries are moving in the direction of a 40-hour working week. For example, Algeria, Brazil (which has moved to a 44-hour working week), Bulgaria, China, the Czech Republic, Morocco (also 44 hours), the Republic of Korea, Portugal and Rwanda are all

moving in the direction of 40 hours. Not all have standard 40-hour working weeks, or even a normal working week not including overtime, but this is the direction that the laws are going in.

However, in terms of actual hours worked, measured in usual hours in many developing and transition countries where overtime is widely deployed, substantial proportions of workers actually work more than 48 hours a week, a figure which is linked with ILO international labour standards going all the way back to 1919. An estimated 22 per cent of workers globally work these excessively long hours.

So there are divergences, a decreasing trend in normal working hours, a continuing proportion of workers with long paid working hours, but also very diverse hours, with a substantial gender gap. Average hours of paid work are longer for men than for women in almost every country in the world. Men around the globe are either working long hours or working short hours but likely to be underemployed, working fewer hours than they would like, earning less than they would prefer, and wanting to work additional hours to earn more money.

Women, on the other hand, more frequently work for fewer paid hours, either in part-time work or in many developing countries in the large informal economy. This is most likely linked to the heavy burden of family care and domestic responsibilities – unpaid work that does not necessarily show up in

any surveys, although more and more time-use surveys are producing data to help illustrate this point, that there is a huge burden of unpaid work for women around the world.

There is a need to reconcile work and family. Part-time jobs aid work and family reconciliation but often have lower hourly rates of pay. Earnings are going to be lower because fewer hours are being worked, but the hourly wage is often lower and, with a few exceptions such as in the Netherlands which has very strong equal treatment legislation, part-timers receive fewer benefits. In the United States for example, women in part-time jobs are much less likely to qualify for health insurance and pensions, and they also have few opportunities for training and for advancement.

Flexible working-time arrangements such as part-time work and flexi-time, as well as childcare facilities, tend to be rare in developing countries. Of course, that is not true across the board, but it is a general trend. Many women turn to jobs in the informal economy to be able to balance work and family. Like the women in the part-time jobs in the formal economy in many countries, women in jobs in the informal economy are able to earn an income while caring for family members – so it aids their work/family balance reconciliation. But this comes at a price: these jobs typically have very poor working conditions and no social protection at all.

Policy responses

This quick and very broad review emphasizes that, when you are thinking about working and employment conditions, working hours and wages, and contract type and work/family reconciliation are very closely linked. Long working hours in developing countries are linked with low wages, which is interesting because it is not really typical anymore in developed countries. In the industrialized world, ironically, you frequently see the longest working hours among managers and professionals – and this is linked to a very high workload, rather than to low wages. It is a very different phenomenon in developing countries where low wages and the low productivity of the companies go together.

Non-standard employment contracts are also often linked with lower wages, fewer benefits and less job security. Difficulties in reconciling paid work with

family responsibilities, and with unpaid work more broadly, which make it very difficult for women to hold down jobs despite their qualifications, are linked to multiple problems, most notably to a lack of flexible hours, informal working and a lack of care facilities. When no care facilities are available for children, ageing parents or a relative who is sick or dying, it creates difficulties across the board.

“Recent studies, including an ILO study, show that minimum wages often act as reference wages even in the informal economy where workers are not formally covered by the minimum wage.”

Given the fact that these conditions are linked, the policy responses to address working conditions need to be linked as well. Policies to improve working conditions should be considered in an integrated manner. For example, wage policies, including establishing an adequate minimum wage, can make an important contribution to breaking that vicious circle of low pay, long working hours and the low productivity of companies. The key is to try to create an upward movement: higher productivity, higher pay and reduced working hours. It is not easy but it can be done. For example, the ILO provides a working-time training programme that provides companies with information on how they can achieve this, even in small and informal enterprises. Recent studies, including an ILO study, show that minimum wages often act as reference wages even in the informal economy where workers are not formally covered by the minimum wage; this is because it is an easy reference for employers and employees to use for pay, so it is often being applied in the informal economy as well.

Policies to help workers combine paid work with family responsibilities can further increase women's participation in the paid workforce. Comprehensive policies are not only for the developed world, they are for developing countries as well. Sometimes very simple things, such as having more flexible working hours, can make a huge difference to women, for example, to manage a problem with a sick child or have time off in emergency family situations. Even

the ability to come to work a couple of hours later in an emergency can make a big difference. Of course, the provision of childcare, elder care and other kinds of care facilities, or of subsidies to try to help women with this issue, can make an incredible con-

tribution to increasing participation by women in the paid workforce, and their ability to provide more hours to that paid workforce, as well as to reducing the gender gaps in pay and working hours discussed above. ■

Changing Patterns of Work in a Global Context

Senator Sharon Carstairs

Parliament of Canada

The presentation examines trends in women's and men's participation in the labour market, and their implications for gender equality in the context of globalization. Women carry a "bag of burdens". In addition to work- and family-related burdens, they carry another bag on top of that, which is "gosh, I don't want to fail because if I do, women coming after me are going to face the censure 'Well we tried a woman once and it didn't work so we won't try another'". That is something that men in the workforce never have to experience.

One of the most significant economic developments of the 20th century was the entry of women into the paid workforce. The growing participation of women in the labour market was a major trend in virtually all industrialized nations in the second half of the 20th century and that trend is now also increasing at a remarkable rate in the less developed nations.

Only 50 years ago, women – particularly wives with dependent children – were still more likely to be in the home pursuing domestic responsibilities while men – particularly husbands and fathers – were engaged in the paid workforce. In 2007 that scenario is increasingly rare. Demographic changes, such as lower birth rates, rising divorce rates and delays in marriage and childbearing, as well as other developments, such as women's rising education levels, changes in social attitudes and the growing demand for women in jobs, are changing the labour force dynamic. In many countries, including my own, economic changes have placed serious limits on the ability of a single male wage-earner to earn enough to support a family, thus necessitating a woman's entry into the workforce. The past 30 years have witnessed significant improvements in the position of women in the labour market – because they need us there and they know it.

In Western countries such as Canada, more and more women are catching up with men in careers such as law, medicine and academia. University enrolment in Canada has a 60:40 gender breakdown in favour of women. But this is not the case for their professors: professors are still overwhelmingly male. Nor are women making the same strides in the trades such as plumbing and carpentry, which are usually associated with the brawn, although with new tools that is no longer the case. It is now just as easy for a woman to do these jobs as it is for men. We also see significant gaps in the police and fire services.

"The skills acquired by women are still not recognized at the top of the heap."

Women-owned businesses, on the other hand, are the fastest growing part of the business sector in Canada. Women create twice as many new businesses as men. In 2002, over 821,000 women in Canada were self-employed – one-third of all self-employed Canadians.

Only 10 per cent of people appointed to sit on corporate boards in Canada are women. The skills acquired by women are still not recognized at the top of the heap. On average, women still earn less than men regardless of their occupation, age or education. In 2007, a woman in Canada earned 72.5 cents for every dollar that a man earned. For aboriginal women, women of colour and new immigrant women, the wage gap is even greater.

The public service has always been a good source of quality jobs for women in Canada. In 2007, 53 per cent of the public service in Canada is made up of

women, and their roles in senior management are increasing. Only 36 per cent of the Deputy Ministers of Canada, the highest level of senior public service, are women – but that represents a significant increase over the past decade.

Ongoing inequalities

Workplaces and social institutions have failed to keep pace with changing labour market trends. Women continue to bear the main responsibilities for child-care and household work despite their entry into the paid workforce. Many women who work outside the home are now confronting what we call the “double day”. Although there is a growing trend for fathers to accept more responsibility for child care, study after study shows that they are not bearing an even load. Non-standard work patterns, such as part-time employment, are sometimes proposed as a suitable alternative to the conflicting demands of work and family, but many women work part time only because they cannot get full-time employment. Moreover, part-time work and other forms of non-standard work are typically characterized by fewer benefits, reduced earnings, limited opportunities for career advancement and greater insecurity. Under these circumstances, the choice made may not be voluntary.

Statistics show, for example, that in Canada single women are among the poorest of the population over age 65. This is primarily because the pension they have earned through the Canada Pension Plan / Quebec Pension Plan is based on the number of years worked, and their employment determines the level of benefit they receive. Not only are women discriminated against in their working life, they will tend also to be discriminated against in their retirement years.

Gender equality in the labour market must also recognize that there is discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace. We have strong laws against both in Canada, but laws in and of themselves are not enough. If women feel that they will lose their job if they do not put up with sexual harassment, or if they do not put up with discrimination, and if they need that job for their family's support, they will put up with harassment or discrimination. Those strong and courageous women who choose to challenge discrimination often find themselves with very high litigation costs.

Women's jobs continue to be primarily in low-paid sectors in Canada. They have much higher poverty rates compared to men. Women are under-represented in senior positions. There are obstacles to adequate education and training, particularly in retraining to re-enter the workforce after women have raised children, and throughout Canada there is an incredible lack of access to quality childcare and elder care.

Women in politics

Women comprise 52 per cent of the population but only 21 per cent of the federally elected Government representatives in the Canadian House of Commons. The situation is slightly better in the federally appointed Senate: 34 per cent of the members are women because past Prime Ministers have made a concerted effort to appoint more women. Research indicates that the presence of women in legislative bodies makes a significant difference not only to what is discussed, but also to the kind of legislation that is advanced. Women legislators are more likely to advance women's issues, to define women's issues more broadly than men, and to put them at the top of the legislative agendas and take a leadership role in these areas. Women legislators make a difference for all women.

“Electoral financing in Canada is far more controlled than it is, for example, in the United States, which is why we have as many women parliamentarians as we do.”

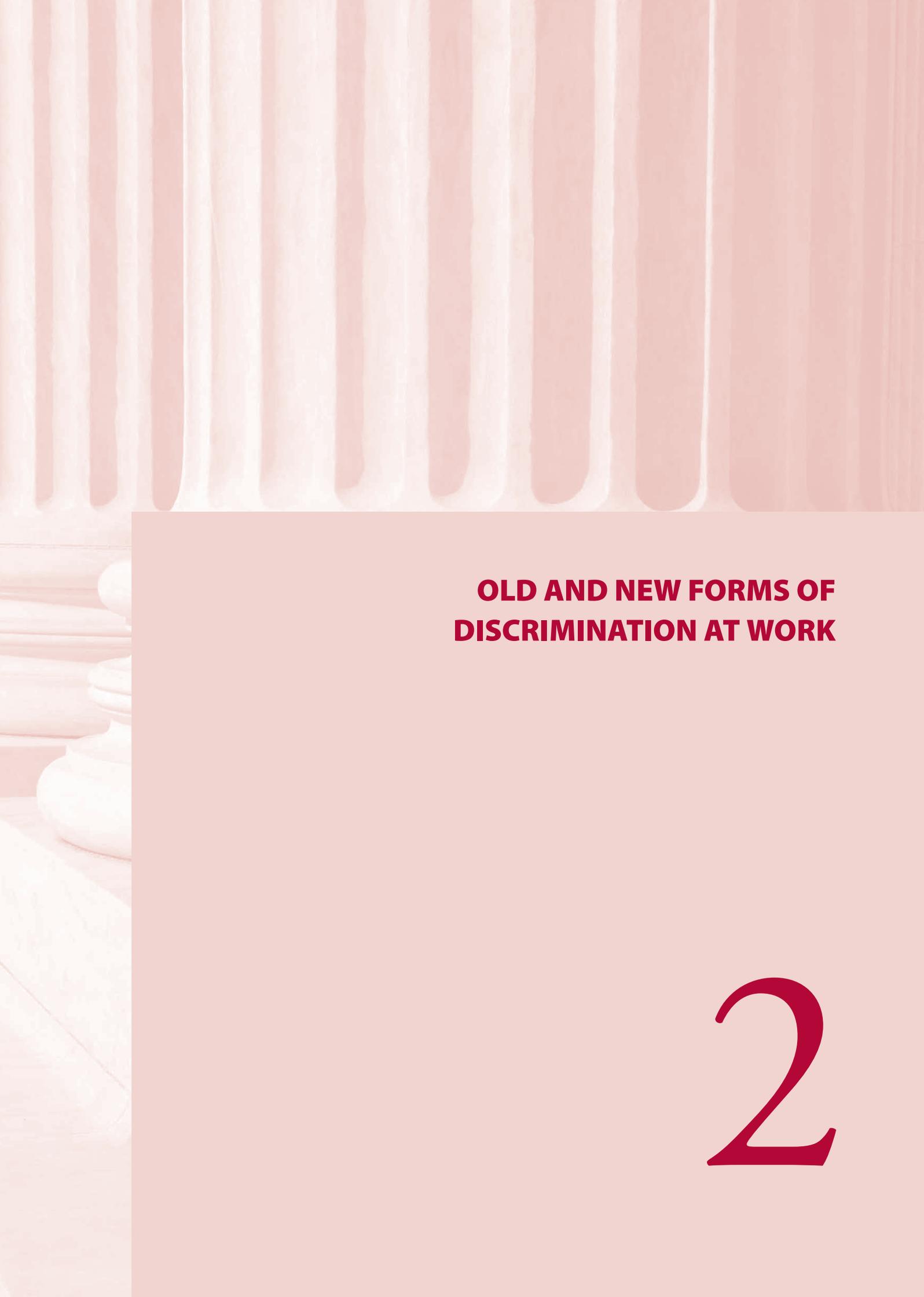
Why aren't more women being elected in Canada? There are a variety of reasons: the size of our country, for instance – it is a huge country and to get from its extremities to the capital can involve up to 15 hours of travel. Electoral financing in Canada is far more controlled than it is, for example, in the United States, which is why we have as many women parliamentarians as we do. US women, for example, are thrilled when they learn about Canadian electoral financing laws. In the 2004 senatorial election it took Hillary Clinton USD 32 million to get herself elected.

My own experience can tell you about attitudes towards women in politics, and I am sure that is

shared by most women. Women are criticized because of our voices; we are criticized because we don't colour our hair; we are criticized because of the clothes we wear, and for the high heels we may choose to wear; and this continues in Canada and in other countries. Perhaps the overall difficulty, however, is that women are still the primary care providers to their children. The Canadian parliament meets five days per week; why it couldn't meet four days per week I have never been able to comprehend. Why not put more childcare arrangements on Parliament Hill, not on a permanent basis but on a temporary basis, so mothers or fathers can bring children for a week or two at a time? Why not employ teachers on Parliament Hill so children can come with their

parents and spend a week in school in Ottawa – and a week with mum or dad?

In conclusion, women continue to have fewer rights, lower levels of educational attainment, a lower health status, less income and less access to resources and decision-making. But they make up 52 per cent of the population and their roles in food production, income generation, management of natural resources, community organization and the domestic arena are absolutely essential for sustainable development. In the global economy, we need to seek solutions to address women's equal participation in the labour force that will make a difference for the generation to come. Not only will women benefit, but so too will Canadian society and the world. ■



**OLD AND NEW FORMS OF
DISCRIMINATION AT WORK**

2

Overview and Debate

The session focused on the old and new forms of discrimination that affect women at work. The panellists examined some of the patterns and reasons for the persistence of long-recognized forms of discrimination against women and discussed the emergence of new and multiple forms of discrimination in today's global economy. The challenges in combating discrimination were also addressed.

The panellists for this session were Ms. Tomei, Chief, Conditions of Work and Employment branch, Labour Protection Department, the ILO; and Ms. Cornish, Senior partner in the law firm Cavalluzzo Hayes Shilton McIntyre & Cornish and Chair of Ontario's Equal Pay Coalition. The focus of Ms. Tomei's presentation was how gender-based discrimination is manifesting itself, with varying degrees of intensity, in different regions due to the effects of globalization on organizational structures. Ms. Cornish provided further analysis of the legal and political ramifications of globalization on employment regulations. She also detailed some of the challenges facing women in this new climate and suggested ways for parliamentarians to target those most in need.

Ms. Tomei defined **employment-related discrimination** as the distinction or exclusion of an individual or a group of individuals based not on their performance, but on secondary features such as their sex, race, religion or any other such consideration. Discrimination, both direct and indirect, has a huge impact on the targeted individual. Although discrimination has been universally condemned, it is still a major problem in today's global economy. It is not only detrimental to the individual, but also, as is demonstrated by economic analyses carried out by the World Bank, counterproductive from the perspective of employers. Discrimination necessarily entails a waste of human talent and translates into a

loss of productivity. The persistence of gender-based discrimination has slowed efforts aimed at poverty alleviation and is a major factor preventing the achievement of general equality.

Ms. Tomei explained that in order to **combat discrimination** in the workplace, it is crucial to recognize that discrimination has both subtle and extreme manifestations, and that it cuts across all sectors. Gender-based discrimination in education, for example, is still prevalent even though there has, in recent years, been an overall decline in the gender gap. The achievements that women have made in terms of education are not translating into progress in the employment sector. It is important to recognize that discrimination is often socially embedded. Thus, addressing discrimination from a labour market perspective may be a good starting point, but in and of itself is not sufficient to remedy all the root causes.

Gender-based discrimination manifests itself in many ways and at all stages of the employment process. Men are often preferred over women in the allocation of jobs. There has also been an increase in discrimination during and after pregnancy, and even in industrialized countries employers are generally reluctant to hire pregnant women. Women often have a higher workload in terms of both paid and unpaid labour. A lack of sex-disaggregated statistics has made it difficult to identify a global trend in remuneration, but the decrease in the pay gap between men and women has certainly not been universal. In some regions, the pay gap has increased, while in others it has either decreased slightly or stagnated. Discrimination also manifests itself in relation to assessing work that might be different in content but is nonetheless of equal value. Sexual harassment and violence against women in the work-

place are perhaps the most serious manifestations of discrimination and remain a universal problem.

All forms of discrimination are closely related and have serious and far-reaching repercussions for women in all sectors. The prevalence of extreme forms of discrimination seems paradoxical given the formal guarantees laid down in international human rights treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This discrepancy underscores the need for the implementation of multidimensional policies based on coherent laws containing effective enforcement measures to ensure compliance with treaty obligations.

Sex-disaggregated statistics are needed to identify priority problems and to evaluate policy decisions. Ms. Tomei suggested that parliamentarians should allocate a larger portion of their budgets to the collection of statistics. In terms of reforming legislation, Ms. Tomei advocated a move away from complaint-based mechanisms and towards the adoption of proactive laws, and highlighted the growing reliance by some states on a system of sanctions and incentives as a form of enforcement. Although the benefits of such systems were noted, it was stated that more must be done to offer victims of discrimination a form of redress. There should also be a diversification of jobs in order to give women access to jobs they are able to do. This includes guaranteeing access to capital and providing equal opportunities for women to enter the job market.

Severer tools can be used to help promote equality in the workplace. Regulating minimum wage policies would be one way of offering protection to women in the lowest income bracket. Similarly, the implementation of an objective system of job evaluation based only on the performance of individuals would limit discrimination and minimize the loss of human talent. Ms. Tomei underlined that the success of policies depends largely on the particular social, political, economic and cultural contexts of the country concerned. The national context must therefore be recognized when identifying which levers to use.

Ms. Cornish focused her presentation on the **role of parliamentarians** in bringing equality to labour markets. She first made clear that some individuals have vested interests in maintaining discriminatory policies, and that it is thus necessary to

acknowledge these interests and to target policies accordingly. Before policies can be implemented, it is crucial that they have strong legal foundations that provide both a system of accountability and methods of enforcement. Promotional laws do help, but only if this base is established first. Moreover, laws must be based on a gendered account of employment conditions, which reflects accurately the experience of women in both the formal and the informal sector.

“Globalization has also induced a decline in unionization, which has subsequently translated into a loss of protection for many workers.”

Although responsibility for ensuring equality and non-discrimination lies primarily with the state, globalization and the increasing pressures of multinational corporations have reduced the ability of states to guarantee protective measures. Globalization has also induced a decline in unionization, which has subsequently translated into a loss of protection for many workers. This trend illustrates the increasing reliance on individualistic rather than collective approaches to protection. Individualistic approaches, however, act to deregularize the labour market and make it increasingly difficult to implement policies that can target all vulnerable groups equally.

Thus, as an alternative to more individualistic approaches to protection, Ms. Cornish suggested that states should try to effectively **map policy objectives and targets**. This would require the collection of data and the analysis of both micro- and macro-level policies to gauge their impact on working women. Once the data are mapped, overlapping areas can be identified and targeted by new or reformed legislation. Ms. Cornish emphasized that “mapping allows for prioritization” in that it helps to locate where people exist irrespective of their socio-economic position. As such, the needs of migrant or domestic workers, for example, as two groups that remain largely invisible, can be mapped in order to see where they intersect, and where they do not, with the provisions of international conventions in order to assess what must be changed to remedy the inequalities.

Plenary Debate

During the discussion, it was re-emphasized that there is a definite link between poverty, unemployment and inequality. Any policy aimed at alleviating one or all of these conditions must therefore be cross-cutting. States should closely examine the reasons behind discrimination, map them out and analyse them. As such, any approach must take into account the **social and cultural traditions** of the society in which the inequality is embedded.

It was noted that **education** is a key component for developing policies to combat discrimination and gender inequality. Education is crucial for both men and women in that it teaches them their respective, and equal, rights and duties. In Uganda, for example, children are taught the historical roots of oppression as a way of preventing patterns from recurring. Ms. Tomei and Ms. Cornish both underscored the importance of education for long-term, sustainable development, but stated that, as a policy on its own,

education would not be enough to change the situation because gender inequalities are also political. It was suggested that reforms of educational systems should thus be part of a wider policy targeting constraints in a collaborative manner. Ms. Cornish said that it is not just a matter of applying a technique to a problem; the relevant issues must first be confronted and analysed before policies can be adequately tailored to the demands of the situation.

Some participants highlighted the difficulties involved in measuring the success of a policy in the short term. Since combating discrimination and inequality is a long-term process, it is often hard to determine whether the progress made in the interim has been superficial or profound. Moreover, considering the way in which discrimination is ingrained at all levels, it is often difficult to identify which aspect of a policy resulted in a positive trend. Predicting the outcome of reforms is thus also a challenge. ■

Gender Discrimination at the Workplace: Trends, Issues and Policy Implications

Ms. Manuela Tomei

Chief, Conditions of Work and Employment Branch,
Labour Protection Department, ILO

Discrimination in employment and occupation, under ILO Convention No. 111 is defined as “any distinction, exclusion or preference, made on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction, social origin, which has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity and treatment in employment and occupation”. Based on this definition, there are three basic elements that have to be present for an action, act, rule or behaviour to be regarded as discriminatory. The first is a distinction or a form of exclusion. The second one is that these acts must cast a judgement on a person’s ability and competence to perform a given job and this action has to result in a disadvantage for the person who is the victim of discrimination. Indeed, Convention No. 111 encompasses both direct and indirect discrimination. Direct discrimination exists in cases where job vacancies specify that women do not need to apply for a given position, making clear that sex is a criterion of selection. Indirect discrimination refers to actions or rules that appear to be gender or age-neutral but may have the effect of affecting disproportionately members of a particular gender or age.

It is very important when talking about discrimination to explain why one should bother about it, why one should care about it, why it is important to combat it. The answer is simple: discrimination entails a waste of human talents, because decisions on recruitment, career advancement, and possibilities of acquiring new skills and competencies are based not on the actual competencies and skills of an individual, but on personal characteristics that have no relationship with the ability to perform a particular task. Discrimination produces losses in labour productivity because, of course, it decreases workers’ motivation. A plethora of empirical studies show how

particular forms of discrimination, including gender-based discrimination, lead to an increase in absenteeism rates, in high rotation rates that have a detrimental effect on enterprises, productivity and competitiveness.

Discrimination undermines labour productivity and the overall economic performance of countries. Empirical evidence shows that there is a positive correlation between greater gender equality and education, on one hand, and more equitable labour market outcomes and enhanced economic performance and GDP growth, on the other. The persistence of gender-based discrimination, as well as any other form of discrimination, has the effect of slowing down efforts aimed at reducing poverty. In the specific case of women, once again, statistics show that women are disproportionately represented among the poor. Therefore, poverty-reduction efforts that fail to address the specific risks, opportunities and situation of men and women will fail to combat poverty effectively.

Gender discrimination has a life-cycle dimension that has to be seen from a double perspective. On the one hand, women workers are of different ages and, therefore, for women and men who work or operate in the labour market, the needs and circumstances vary significantly by age. On the other, there should be some sort of adjustment of the organization of work and the workplace with a view to suiting these different needs. Discrimination is a phenomenon that is constantly changing because it is very much related to what happens in the structures of labour markets and in the composition of employment. It often acquires very subtle manifestations, and is therefore difficult to detect. This is very much the case in countries with a long tradition of addressing and combating discrimination. It mirrors and reinforces discrimination in other social arenas such as the family, community, school; the disadvantages that women

may have accumulated during the period of their life prior to entry into the labour market will actually affect their ability to obtain quality jobs and will also reinforce this image of women being less productive. Therefore, discrimination must be addressed not only in the labour market, but also in other social arenas. Notwithstanding, the workplace, very broadly defined, is a key strategic entry point to address discrimination not only in employment and occupation but also elsewhere.

The condemnation of discrimination is universal. Most states in the world have subscribed and adhered to the task of combating discrimination by becoming party to Conventions N°III and 100. Convention No. III deals with discrimination in employment and occupation. Convention No. 100 deals with equal remuneration for men and women, not only for equal work, but also for work of equal value.

“[T]he gender gaps in education are declining everywhere, and more women than men enrol in universities in most regions.”

How are women faring in the labour market? First of all, the gender gaps in education are declining everywhere, and more women than men enrol in universities in most regions. In South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, however, there is still a significant gap in educational attainments of girls and boys as far as primary and secondary education is concerned, and particularly as far as tertiary education is concerned. But for the other regions in the world, such as East Asia and the Pacific, Europe (non-EU and Central Asia), the European Union, North America, the Middle East and North Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean, there is quasi equality in primary and secondary education, and in tertiary education women are actually outperforming men. This is very telling in that it reveals that there is no point in investing so much in women's education if the fruits of this investment are not then properly put at the disposal of larger society and of the economy.

Women's entry into the labour market continues in a majority of countries. Labour participation rates encompass employment rates plus unemployment rates. In 2006, there has been an increase in the num-

ber of women entering into the labour market in a majority of countries. Even though there are significant variations by region, there has been a significant increase – a five percentage point increase – in the Middle East and North Africa even though overall the rate continued to be rather low.

Women's employment-to-population ratios have increased in a majority of countries, while men's ratios have declined. There are also more women in high-status-jobs: data for 1995 and 2004 show that the shares of women in legislative and managerial positions have increased everywhere in the world. This increase has been very striking in South Asia, even though, again, the share is still very low in the Middle East and North Africa, and in Latin America and the Caribbean.

What are the pending challenges? There are too many women who work without pay or who are employed in informal or non-regular jobs. There are significant variations by region with regard to the relative incidence of unpaid labour. Unpaid labour is very prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa, it is very high in East Asia and the Pacific, among others, and the variations over time in the allocation of total female employment among different forms of employment have been rather slow.

Women's workload – both paid and unpaid work – is much higher than men's. According to data available on Bolivia, Ghana and the Philippines, women devote in total (in terms of weekly hours) 61 hours per week to work, 26 hours to paid work and 35 hours to unpaid work. Unpaid work refers to family responsibilities, cooking for the family, collecting water, fuel, etc. in order to provide for the household. Men devote 42 hours a week to paid work and nine hours to unpaid work, hence a significant imbalance in the distribution of hours between men and women with regard to paid and unpaid work. This obviously has implications for the types of jobs that women can aspire to have. In Ghana and the Philippines, the situation is very similar: women work longer hours: 61 in Bolivia compared to 51 for men; and 88 hours in Ghana for women compared to 57 hours for men.

Women continue to earn less on average than men. This is an issue which has been a persistent problem. Comparable data on wages for a large number of countries is unavailable; this is very much related to the problems relating to wage-related statistics in general. When examining the evolution of the gen-

der pay gap in the manufacturing sector for which comparable data is available for about 37 countries, it emerges that in some countries the gender pay gap has stagnated, in others it has increased, while in others still there has been a reduction.

There continues to be discrimination in the allocation of jobs. There are certain jobs that continue to be considered more suitable for men than for women, and vice versa. This of course results in a concentration of women in particular occupations, and the fact that there is an over-supply of labour for those occupations and sectors results also in lower earnings associated with those occupations.

“In many countries, pregnancy tests continue to be carried out regularly, with a view to making decisions as to whether to retain or dismiss women workers.”

There is still a lot of discrimination occurring on the basis of pregnancy status and motherhood. This is a very old form of discrimination, and available statistics show that there appears to be an increase in the occurrence of discrimination based on pregnancy status, even in industrialized countries such as the United States of America and the United Kingdom. This increase may be a reflection of the fact, not necessarily that there is a worsening of the situation, but certainly that there is greater awareness with regard to the issue, and greater trust perhaps in redress mechanisms, certainly in industrialized countries, etc. In many countries, pregnancy tests continue to be carried out regularly, with a view to making decisions as to whether to retain or dismiss women workers. In some instances, when women are recruited or offered a job, they are asked to commit themselves to not have children for a certain number of years as a condition for being provided with a job.

There is discrimination in remuneration, where men and women doing the same work or similar work are paid differently (women less than men), which is still the case in the agricultural sector, for instance. In some countries, collective agreements actually provide for different hourly rates by sex, for exactly the same work. This is direct discrimination. This type of discrimination is somewhat declining, but there

is a significant problem with regard to discrimination in relation to work of equal value. Work of equal value refers to jobs that may be different in content but that may be equal in terms of their value, meaning the working conditions in which they are carried out, the responsibilities that are associated with them, and the level of competencies and skills that they require.

Sexual harassment is a ramification of domestic violence against women that is taking place in the workplace. Again, there are very few statistics on this, but there is a growing effort being made with a view to documenting and making visible this form of violence and other manifestations of violence against women.

Another manifestation of discrimination at the workplace is this unequal division of paid and unpaid work between men and women. Moreover, gender segregation, gender discrimination and remuneration and unequal division of paid and unpaid work are closely interrelated. The fact that women are confined to certain occupations has a certain bearing on their level of earnings and this in turn has an implication for decisions that are taken at the household level, with regard to who should work longer hours, or who should stay at home to look after the family.

What to do? A combination of policy means is obviously required. Because of these interlinkages, action has to be taken on the different sources of disadvantage for women in the labour market. One key issue is measuring and monitoring trends in women's labour market outcomes relative to men's. Without statistics, disaggregated by sex, that actually show where men and women are located, what type of jobs they are doing, how they are progressing, it will be extremely difficult to understand what the priority problems are and what the impact of public policies is. This is very important for parliamentarians who are concerned about ensuring that a public budget is allocated in such a way as to maximize social outcomes. Therefore, in order to make informed decisions about where to allocate scarce resources, it is important to have a clear vision, a clear picture of the problems.

Coherent and effective laws and enforcement mechanisms are also part of the equation. There is a shift from individual complaint-based mechanisms to proactive laws. Proactive laws are meant actually to encourage changes in the way the work-life is orga-

nized, in the way human resources policies are structured with a view to ensuring that both men and women can benefit from employment opportunities, rather than waiting for an individual who alleges to be a victim of discrimination to file a complaint with the competent authorities.

There should be consistency between the different bodies of law; between labour codes and civil or family laws. Indeed, the effectiveness of provisions for equality in employment and occupation might be undermined if there are no similar efforts made in terms of making sure that civil codes and family laws are providing for gender equality.

There is a growing reliance on sanctions. This is one of the main features of developments in the anti-discrimination field across the globe, but there is also growing reliance on incentives and promotional mechanisms.

Another issue that has to be addressed is the problem of obstacles to accessing justice. This is particularly the case of women who are not well educated, who may not be aware of what redress mechanisms are at their disposal, and who may not be aware of the fact that they have rights, that these rights are affirmed by law and that there are ways of solving problems and redressing discrimination.

There is a need for a coherent set of national public policy interventions that will act simultaneously on occupational segregation, discrimination in remuneration and unequal division of paid and unpaid labour. In order to address occupational segregation, efforts have to be made to diversify the type of jobs that men and women do, to allow women to have access to non-traditional jobs. These can be obtained through a range of measures. Women's entrepreneurship development, targeted programmes that are aimed at addressing the specific obstacles that women entre-

preneurs face in terms of access to capital, in terms of access to markets, in terms of access to technology are part of policy interventions aimed at reducing occupational segregation and ensuring a more balanced distribution of men and women across sectors.

Discrimination in remuneration can be addressed in a variety of ways. One is the use of job evaluation methods free of gender bias. This is a very relevant issue in countries whose public sectors are undergoing serious reforms, because there is a change also in the way payments are made, in the wage composition, etc.

Minimum wage policies constitute another policy tool that can be relied upon with a view to reducing discrimination, particularly for those workers at the bottom of the labour market, in order to ensure a more even division of paid and unpaid labour so as to allow women and men to be mothers and fathers. Fatherhood is a right, taking care of the children and contributing to raising them, and not only providing food and the shelter, is important and is a right. Measures that can contribute to this range from child-care arrangements, to different types of parental leave.

The sequencing and mix of these policies can vary considerably depending on national circumstances. Everything cannot be addressed at once; some priorities will have to be established, but what is important is to bear in mind that whatever is adopted in one field will have implications for the other issues because of the interlinkages that exist.

Employers' and workers' organizations are an essential part of the equation, and tripartite dialogue and tripartite commissions on gender and work can also provide a very interesting forum and opportunity for the key actors of the labour market to get together to deal with very topical issues, such as trade and unemployment: how men and women are affected by trade, by processes of economic integration. ■

Ending Labour Market Gender Discrimination: Bringing Gender Mainstreaming to Parliamentary Laws and Institutions

Ms. Mary Cornish

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Chair of Ontario's Equal Pay Coalition

Introduction

With the world dependent on women's work for its prosperity and women representing the majority of the world's poor, ending labour market gender discrimination is a critical building block to securing sustainable development and reducing poverty. Given that the state is the primary guardian of human rights compliance for those within its borders, parliamentarians have a special governance role to play in securing labour market gender equality.

“Systemic gender inequalities permeate all aspects of women’s work lives, including whether or not they have paid work at all and the conditions of their work.”

Globalized labour markets still continue to deny the world's women one of the most basic human rights – the right to non-discriminatory work and income. Systemic gender inequalities permeate all aspects of women's work lives, including whether or not they have paid work at all and the conditions of their work. This discrimination takes many different forms, some which are new but many of which have long existed. The ILO and states measure “decent work” by reference to whether work is available, freely chosen, productive, sustainable, equitable, secure and dignified. On these criteria, the global number of women who are engaged in “decent work” lags far behind that of men.

This paper highlights for parliamentarians the discriminatory and gendered patterns of global labour markets and the international gender equality standards and norms which reflect the international

consensus on how to end such systemic gender discrimination. The paper then reviews key challenges and priority issues which must be addressed in order to mainstream gender equality thinking and actions into parliamentary laws and institutions which govern the labour market.

The Gendered Labour Market: Globalization and Patterns of Inequality

Global labour markets are marked by five significant trends which affect women's labour market inequalities, with industrialized and developing countries alike sharing these trends. The burden of inequality falls greatest on women workers where poverty, the informal economy, weak employment regulation, racial, ethnic and disability discrimination and violence are most pronounced.¹

These five trends are as follows:

1. More women are working for pay. Over the past 20 years, this shift has been linked to the expansion in export-led industrial development associated with globalization. Female wage labour participation varies widely from country to country but in less than half the world are women even approaching parity with men. The proportion of working women in salaried and waged employment increased from 41.8 percent in 1997 to 46.4 percent in 2007.
2. Over the past 20 years, women's wages have improved gradually, yet nowhere have women achieved average wages which equal men's. In the European Union, the pay gap has remained virtually unchanged at 15 percent across all sectors. Instances of closing wage gaps are at times due more to a drop in male wages than an increase in women's.

3. Occupational segregation for men and women continues. Despite the first two trends, men and women continue to do different work in different workplaces. In this context, “different” for women usually means “bad”. Within both the formal and informal economy, men dominate higher-paying “production” jobs and women dominate lower-paying “care-giving” or “home-based” or informal jobs. This sex segregation in work reflects a value system in which men’s work is considered superior economically, socially and legally. Women’s full integration into the labour market continues to be resisted and surrounded by patriarchal stereotypes, prejudices, misconceptions and culturally-based expectations about gender roles and what constitutes “valuable work”.
4. Women continue to carry a double burden. They continue to balance the demands of paid work and the demands of unpaid care work in sustaining families and communities. This impacts on the economic choices that are available to women. Women’s double burden and time poverty are exacerbated as women are forced to take on added domestic obligations as the population ages, global poverty increases, HIV/AIDS rises internationally, and states roll back, privatize and eliminate public services.
5. Women’s work is concentrated in the precarious work sector of both the formal and informal economy. Although women’s labour force participation has increased, this growth has come largely in that sector, mostly in the informal economy through self-employment, part-time employment, casual and temporary employment and home-based low-income work. Such precarious work:
 - a) Is highly vulnerable;
 - b) Is very low-paid and irregular;
 - c) Is excluded formally or in practice from legal and regulatory frameworks, and
 - d) Lacks access to employee and social security benefits.

In 2003, about two-thirds of the female work force in the developing world (outside of agriculture) was found in the informal economy, including home-based work, street vending, and the sex trade.² Increasingly, some women have no “employer” at all, as many become self-employed, are in disguised employment or work as own account workers.³ This means they are also denied access to the legal

protections and benefits which employed workers have. With trade liberalization in the agricultural sector, some women have lost their livelihoods and face discrimination as producers in gaining access to the new economy activities.

In sum, globally, women continue to work in environments characterized by unfair labour practices and work conditions: they face discrimination, unequal and low-wages, and few opportunities for participation in decision making, career advancement and long-term employment stability. Poor women are mostly unable to work themselves and their families out of poverty.⁴ The persistence of this picture of systemic labour market gender discrimination led governments and institutions to develop the international gender equality standards set out in the next section. A comparison of these standards to the picture drawn above makes it clear that states and their parliaments have not been able to effectively secure the protection of those rights for the women who work in and across their borders.

Globalization has clearly opened some opportunities for women in more industrialized and developing countries to improve their position. But at the same time, in order to attract transnational companies (TNCs) and compete in the global production system, many states have eased legislation or refrained from legislating or enforcing equality protections. Low paid women are often seen as a country’s comparative advantage.⁵ Others have legislated formal measures but failed to enforce them or the measures have failed to achieve their intended results.

National markets labour and work conditions are significantly affected by international or regional trade arrangements and investment, and international financial institutions and transnational corporate businesses practices;⁶ with the new economy often leading to structural adjustment programmes, deregulation, tax cuts, privatization of public services, anti-collective bargaining laws and business-friendly export processing zones, labour and human rights are often seen as a barrier to trade and growth. These policies also reduce state resources and reduce states’ capacity to regulate and implement laws and policies which protect the labour rights of women. They can also drive governments to further depend on underpaid women’s work to deliver the remaining public services and on women’s unpaid care and community work when public services are privatized or eliminated.⁷

International Gender Equality Standards

1. Systemic Problem Needs Systemic Remedies

The right to a labour market free of gender discrimination is a fundamental human right and an ILO core labour standard. The international legal system governing labour markets is made up of many intersecting and overlapping instruments. They are set out primarily in ILO Conventions and Recommendations but are also contained in UN and regional instruments. These standards are the foundational basis for the international community's commitment in Goal 3 of the Millennium Development Goals and the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. Together these instruments form the world's legal framework within which women's specific rights can be strengthened, states' positive obligations can be clarified, and effective mechanisms to monitor compliance with international obligations can be established and improved. At the national and local level, country-specific labour laws and policies apply.⁸

“Women’s economic inequality is inextricably intertwined with social and political discrimination on the basis of sex.”

International law instruments have evolved over the past 50 years to recognize the systemic and multi-layered nature of women's labour market discrimination. In recognizing the systemic dynamics and need to level the economic playing field for woman, international instruments have become increasingly detailed, requiring national governments and workplace parties to take positive, proactive steps to establish substantive equality, and established reporting obligations and mechanisms for external monitoring. They have also recognized women's specialized needs as workers (see for example the ILO conventions on maternity protection, workers with family responsibilities, part-time work and home work). Women's economic inequality is inextricably intertwined with social and political discrimination on the basis of sex. The multi-faceted dynamics of sex discrimination require comprehensive and systemic remedies as the building blocks of a discriminatory labour market are very deep.

Discriminatory labour conditions are sustained by discrimination inherent in education, healthcare,

violence against women and political and social exclusion. Documents like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPFA) point to the need for systemic change to build sustainable equality. Changes must encompass: a) equal access to education, as the foundation for workplace inequality begins early; b) equal access to vocational training and retraining; c) equal access to employment opportunities; d) equal terms and conditions of work, promotion, evaluation; e) equal remuneration; f) the right not to be discriminated against due to pregnancy or family responsibilities and so on. International labour law has transformed from a traditional focus on the regulation of male dominated “standard” work to taking a more systemic, inter-disciplinary and inter-institutional approach that can address the social, political and economic roots of women's labour market discrimination.

2. International Guiding Principles

The following principles can be distilled from the international instruments, reflecting a world-wide consensus on the nature of labour market inequalities facing women and the steps which need to be implemented to redress those inequalities.⁹

1. Labour market equality for women is a priority which warrants immediate attention and concerted action from all governments. Every available measure must be explored and the maximum available resources must be allocated towards securing these objectives. The achievement of equality for women in all aspects of life is a fundamental precondition for achieving a sustainable, just and developed society;
2. Gender-based employment discrimination is systemic in nature. Traditional patterns of conduct and conceptions of what constitutes “valuable work” must be transformed in order to achieve greater workplace equality;
3. Securing gender justice requires a multi-faceted approach with measures requiring governments, employers and trade unions to take proactive steps coordinated through national action plans to address gender equality on a systematic basis;
4. Women's right to equal pay for work of equal value is a fundamental labour standard and a human right of the highest priority;

5. Governments should recognize the precarious position of female migrant workers and must implement measures to protect this group against involuntary confinement, forced labour, trafficking, and all other forms of labour and human rights abuse;
6. Governments should apply a gender perspective in the creation and implementation of labour laws. They must ensure that women play an active role in this process;
7. Governments should ensure and guarantee equality outcomes. As employers, they are held to the highest standards. Government must enforce adherence to workplace equality laws by public authorities and institutions;
8. As a follow up to the BDPA and Beijing+5, employers (including private sector employers) have an obligation to take proactive steps to implement equal pay for work of equal value, to eliminate gender segregation in the labour force, and to review, analyse and reformulate wage structures for female-dominated jobs with a view to raising their status and earnings;
9. Achieving equality is connected with the operation of other fundamental labour rights, including freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. The methods to achieve labour market gender equality must recognize that collective bargaining is an important mechanism to eliminate wage discrimination and to secure adequate work conditions. In formulating legislation and taking steps to eradicate discrimination, and protect fundamental human rights, governments should consult employers, trade unions, and civil society;
10. Governments should create effective enforcement mechanisms for ensuring compliance with international and national labour law standards. All labour complainants should have access to a competent tribunal that can: adjudicate their rights; issue and enforce an effective remedy; and impose sanctions for non-compliance. Effective enforcement also should provide access to legal aid for vulnerable persons seeking to enforce their rights;
11. On-going monitoring, reporting and follow up within a defined time frame are necessary in order to ensure the practical implementation and realization of gender equality and full labour participation.¹⁰

3. The ILO “Decent Work” Framework

Globally, national governments have agreed to the Decent Work Agenda which aims to bring equitably, to men and women, decent work and livelihoods, job-related security and better living standards to the people of both poor and rich countries. This Agenda obliges countries to promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity. It seeks to do this by promoting rights at work, encouraging opportunities for decent employment, enhancing social protection and strengthening dialogue on work-related issues.¹¹ While the Decent Work Agenda was originally developed and endorsed by ILO member States, it was adopted globally through the September 2005 UN Summit Outcome Document and the July 2006 ECOSOC Ministerial Statement.

“The goal is to eliminate the negative aspects of informality while keeping the opportunities for livelihood and entrepreneurship and promoting the protection and incorporation of workers and economic enterprises into the mainstream economy.”

The Agenda supports the policy convergence between informal and formal labour markets through its recognition of the continuum of production and employment relations and the many linkages and interdependencies between the formal and informal sectors. It commits countries and institutions to enhance decent work along the continuum rather than forcing all informal work to become “formal”. The goal is to eliminate the negative aspects of informality while keeping the opportunities for livelihood and entrepreneurship and promoting the protection and incorporation of workers and economic enterprises into the mainstream economy.¹² ILO member countries, enterprise organizations and employee representatives agreed in the Agenda on the need for effective and enforceable laws along with protections for self-organization and collective action while also taking steps to promote job creation. This balanced the concern of enterprise representatives that the entrepre-

neurial potential of the informal economy should be facilitated and the concern of worker representatives that legal and institutional frameworks are necessary to ensure informal workers can gain access to the core labour protections.¹³

Key Challenges and Priority Issues for Consideration

With the diversity of country and women's work contexts, it is clear that the particular challenges facing parliamentarians are country-specific and there is no single solution. However, there are some key challenges which generally face parliamentarians and there are some priority issues which should be considered in developing country-specific solutions.

1. The Equality Role of the State

As noted above, international human rights instruments impose proactive obligations on government to “adopt all necessary measures” to eliminate discrimination by any person, organization or enterprise. With the widespread violation of women's labour rights, women need more effective and tailored state interventions, not less.¹⁴ Such interventions take many forms, such as establishing a framework of effective and resourced laws, policies, institutions and supportive measures which will translate those standards into accessible justice mechanisms. States' leadership role as a human rights “duty bearer” means they are held to the highest standards as employers and law and policy makers.

As noted earlier in this paper, most of the world has legally bound itself to create and implement effective gender equality mechanisms through domestic laws, policies and collective bargaining regimes. As a result, labour rights are not “optional”. The only discretion should be choosing the best country-specific and realistically operational way (given country capacity and resources) to identify and dismantle the long-standing patterns of systemic labour inequality. This practical, “rights-based” approach helps prioritize such anti-discrimination measures in cost-cutting government exercises, empowers workers to claim redress, and acknowledges workers' previously marginalized contributions.¹⁵

International standards require governments to begin from the basis that systemic discrimination

against women is a reality and legal mechanisms must therefore be designed so that such discrimination can be made visible and then rooted out. From this starting point, the international instruments commit governments, employers and civil society to the goal of transforming the ways in which women and their work are treated and valued.

2. The Politics and Costs of Equality and Inequality

Efforts to increase women's economic power and choices change the balance of power and challenge the relatively privileged position of men and their work and the power of businesses and governments to profit and benefit from women's work contributions. Despite the formal global consensus, when it comes to implementation, women are repeatedly faced with the argument that state action is not necessary as the free market will end their discrimination over time. It is also argued that redressing their inequality is too costly or too complicated and therefore does not make good business sense or public policy. Some argue that in countries where a large percentage of workers make less than one dollar a day, there is a need to focus on other economic issues instead of enforcing labour standards that may not be affordable. In those countries, women workers facing systemic gender discrimination are usually clustered at the unpaid or lowest paid ranks and their specific and gendered needs must be addressed and given some priority.

With enterprises and governments relying on the involuntary contributions of women's unpaid or underpaid labour to sustain their operations and economies, the equality debt owed to women continues to increase, with not enough planning for how it is to be redressed. For every year of inaction the damage inflicted by discrimination is deeper and the systemic benefits of equality fail to materialize.¹⁶ As well, the failure to take action means that women's discrimination often remains invisible, as happens when discrimination is not addressed because other priorities are considered more pressing.

Quantifying the costs and benefits of eliminating gender discrimination is difficult, but a 2001 World Bank study documents extensive benefits from empowering women, including better health and well-being for women, children, and men; higher overall

productivity and economic growth; and better governance.¹⁷ Gender inequality in employment contravenes women's right to decent work and is costly for women, their households and their communities.¹⁸ Given the large and growing number of informal workers and enterprises, particularly in developing countries, harnessing the economic potential of the informal sector requires addressing the structural inequality barriers which prevent them from developing that potential, and designing measures to enhance their effective participation, including regulatory justice mechanisms and access to them.¹⁹ Sustainable anti-discrimination mechanisms should include a plan for moving towards labour market gender equality over a realistic time frame, along with a civil society strategy for gaining political support and measures to address any backlash which occurs.

3. Rethinking “Labour Laws and Rights”: Many Mechanisms and Actors

Enforcing workers' labour rights in a globalized economy requires an innovative and broad-based legal and socio-economic approach which takes into account the complexities of discrimination dynamics, the competing priorities for government resources and the often weak labour and judicial structures.²⁰ There is a need to recognize that the work “standard” for women includes many different types of worker and self employment relationships, and equality promoting mechanisms must vary accordingly.²¹ Given that discrimination is so deeply entrenched in all aspects of the labour market exchange, a sustainable labour rights system requires a combination of transformative laws, institutions promoting human rights and supportive policy measures to address these aspects simultaneously.²²

National authorities and social partners are now considering new governance models to realize women's labour and human rights entitlements.²³ This includes reconsidering the traditional concept of a fixed and single “workplace”, who is an “employee”, and analyzing the conditions for decent work along the continuum of employment from informal to formal.²⁴ The new paradigm of transnational labour and human rights law is comprised of many different equality mechanisms and actors. While the traditional parameters of labour law were contracts, collective bargaining and statutory regulation, labour law and socio-economic policy are increasingly merging.²⁵

As regulating mechanisms now involve a range of normative and binding rules including trading rules, there is a need to reconsider the interconnecting roles of the state and social partners and the new roles for other non-state actors. This includes women's advocacy organizations, consumer organizations, and organizations of women entrepreneurs, trade actors, and development institutions. With the increase in “decentred” regulations, such as corporate codes of conduct, enterprises and governments must take into account the “regulatory” effect and equality role of non-state actors. Given this situation, laws and regulations will need to provide the necessary framework of enterprise/trade union/women's representative rights and obligations to support women's empowerment.²⁶

4. Knowledge, Capacity Building and Dialogue

Equitable labour market governance requires that parliaments and labour market actors within a country, including the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Justice, national women's machinery and the judiciary operate in a gender-sensitive fashion. This should include developing mechanisms to assist in coordinating and executing their respective mandates.

In carrying out their legislative responsibilities, parliamentarians are often faced with mediating the gulf that exists between economic and legal practitioners, with each expressing some frustration that their perspectives were not sufficiently understood or taken into account by the other. Given the intersecting economic and legal barriers to women's equality there is increasing recognition that this gulf between the worlds of law and economics must be bridged and collaborations developed. This requires better incorporation of economic perspectives in parliament's rule-making work and, at the same time, better incorporation of the legal imperatives of women's gender equality into economic thinking.

5. Labour Market Regulation: Balancing Protection, Security and Flexibility

There is a need for parliaments to enact legal mechanisms which achieve the proper balance between protection, flexibility, security and economic growth.²⁷ At the same time that women continue to experience widespread discrimination resulting in the need for increased and specially designed labour market

equality protections, many governments and enterprises, given the forces of globalization, economic restructuring and the search for low wage markets, are being pressured to eliminate or reduce labour market protections which are said to impede “flexibility” and/or are too costly.

The World Bank’s influential *Cost of Doing Business Survey* has made an important contribution to the worldwide need to reduce unnecessary regulatory costs and costs of entering businesses. However, by favoring countries with lesser regulations; by using employment indicators which consider the “flexibility” in hiring, firing, hours of work and non-salary costs of workers, and by encouraging reforms which reduce “rigidities” in the market, the Survey has been interpreted as discouraging new regulatory measures. True “rigidities” which impede equitable growth should be distinguished from regulation which positively promotes pro-women growth. *Doing Business 2008* explicitly recognizes the states’ role in enacting regulations to protect workers from discrimination and the role of the ILO and calls for “flexible labour regulations” that give opportunities which boost job creation without “giving up protections”.²⁸

6. Mainstreaming Gender Equality into Labour Market Governance

Delivering equitable outcomes for women’s work along the labour market continuum requires the right mix of tailored, country-specific systemic solutions to address women’s unequal work and pay conditions. As gender-based labour market discrimination is the result of complex social interactions and deeply held sexist prejudices, redress mechanisms must confront the social, cultural and patriarchal stereotypes and restraints which label women’s work as secondary or marginal and therefore less valuable or worthy of protection than men’s work.²⁹ As well, starting to recognize and protect women’s work helps to lessen the victimization and powerlessness which women experience in other aspects of their lives. Ultimately, long term changes to end discrimination against women also require measures to address the discrimination women face in health, education, exposure to violence, conflict and poverty.³⁰

Use of Mapping and Gender Sensitive Data

Securing gender equality for the diversity of women’s work is a complex problem as the drivers forging dis-

crimination against women are multi-faceted and inter-connected. There is a need to “diagnose” the national, local and enterprise or business context and circumstances. Using sex-disaggregated data, women’s and men’s work and pay need to be mapped along the formal/informal labour market continuum to locate, compare and understand the different conditions of both women’s and men’s work and the discriminatory conditions which drive the unequal conditions of women’s work relative to men’s at each point on the continuum. Such mapping helps bring to the foreground the other systemic barriers women face, such as reconciling work and family life and gender-based violence.³¹ With women’s work often invisible or discounted in the process of developing labour laws and norms, human rights tools such as “mapping” shine a light on the differences in men’s and women’s working conditions and form the human rights basis for laws and policies which raise women’s pay and working conditions to those of men along that continuum. Based on the mapping data, equality mechanisms can be designed to address the needs of each set of women workers and the conditions which drive the discrimination against women’s work at each point on the continuum.³²

Gender Sensitive Planning and Laws

With countries bound by international, regional and country level laws which provide for the right of women to work without discrimination, a rights-based approach to planning is necessary as it sets a legal floor for securing women’s labour market equality. Working in consultation with women’s voice organizations, there is a need to translate this legal floor into a combination of country-specific laws and policies which will address the context of women’s work in that country along the continuum of formal and informal work. This requires laws, budgeting analysis, planning and strategies to be based on implementing gender equality promoting mechanisms which will achieve the progressive realization of those rights. Yet many countries have laws and policies which serve to reinforce rather than eliminate the disadvantage and discrimination faced by women. As well, some well-intentioned laws go off course and fail to achieve their objective.

Parliamentarians must engage in a gender sensitive analysis both at the time of considering new budgets and laws or policies and in reviewing existing ones to identify whether they are impeding or

supporting women's economic empowerment and equality. They should also be interlinked and grounded in other poverty reducing strategies and in the country reports such as those prepared for the ILO and the UN with respect to treaty and convention compliance.

The Decent Work Agenda is designed to allow each country is to define its own roadmap to decent work in the context of the country-specific needs and circumstances. Through its Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCP), the ILO provides technical assistance to help member countries to develop plans to support the creation of decent work.³³ Using a gender-sensitive framework and sex-disaggregated data, the Agenda requires special efforts to be taken to promote the opportunities, rights, protection and voice of women in the informal economy who are often the most disadvantaged.³⁴

7. Role of Enterprises

Recognizing that women work for enterprises in a number of different relationships, there is a need for laws and policies which require and encourage enterprises to pro-actively remove systemic gender discrimination from all the work and pay systems which drive the undervaluation and unequal conditions of that work, including subcontracting terms. Within a framework of mandatory gender equality laws and policies, and working with women's representatives, enterprises can then take the lead in building a culture of gender equality compliance through establishing pro-women business practices. This includes incorporating gender equality compliance in corporate social responsibility (CSR) mechanisms. The Calvert Women's Principles explicitly include the need for equal remuneration for work of equal value and non-discrimination principles and apply them to women's waged and entrepreneurial work.³⁵

8. Role of Women's Voice and Collective Bargaining

Women's voice through unions or other organizations must be at the centre of identifying and implementing appropriate labour market mechanisms. Given women's current income and power deficits, they often do not have the time, resources or information to assert their rights. It is necessary to take measures that enable women to exercise their collective bargaining and other labour rights, including the right

for their entrepreneurial voices to be heard and acted upon in economic-decision making.³⁶ The World Bank has recently stated that "the collective organization of workers is one of the main channels for securing better and more equitable working conditions".³⁷ Equality obligations of the enterprise may also be included in the collective agreements negotiated with the trade union. As a result of corporate codes of conduct agreed to by mostly transnational corporations, often where employees are not unionized in a supply chain, corporations may also undertake equality obligations.

The global union Public Services International (PSI) has been carrying out for many years a worldwide campaign entitled "Pay Equity Now", which operates in both developed and developing countries providing resources and training materials and assisting women and trade unions to mobilize and enforce their pay equity rights.³⁸ Ontario's Equal Pay Coalition played a key role in lobbying for Ontario's *Pay Equity Act* and mobilizing support for ongoing pay equity compliance.³⁹ Some of the most effective organizing of women's voices to increase women's pay has come from organizations of women entrepreneurs, such as SEWA in India.⁴⁰

9. Extending Anti-Discrimination Measures to Precarious Work

While gender equality mechanisms to date have focussed primarily on formal waged work, there is a need to develop new mechanisms to deliver gender equitable conditions and pay/income all along the entire continuum of women's work. The increasing "precariousness" of women's work requires everyone to rethink existing strategies and laws and look at other existing labour market tools for their application to this issue. One method is to take a more interactive approach to the scope of international gender equality standards. When Convention 100 is read with Convention 111 and CEDAW, it extends the legal obligations to eliminate pay discrimination to women in self-employment/own account work and to informal economy work, where Convention 100 job comparisons are difficult. This approach also targets the most disadvantaged women such as Aboriginal women, immigrant women, women with disabilities/HIV/AIDS and elderly women.

Establishing sectoral and national wages is an option. Centralized bargaining has traditionally tended

to favour equality concerns. In the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, the decentralization of the industrial relations framework has had a negative impact on bargaining for gender equality, particularly for equality in remuneration.⁴¹ The recent experience in Portugal with the implementation of a sectoral job evaluation process in the restaurant sector is being evaluated for its lessons for other sectors and countries.⁴² Minimum wage laws have also been a tool of pay equity campaigns dating back to the 1970's when they formed a key part of Ontario's Equal Pay Coalition campaign.⁴³ Increases in minimum wages in developing countries have improved women's pay where the equalization of minimum rates occurred between men and women in sector-level collective agreements and where it established comparable wages across dissimilar and often sex-segregated workplaces.⁴⁴ In Chile, the Government introduced a phased-in minimum wage for household workers who are predominantly female. For poor women, pay equity is now seen more broadly as part of the overall struggle to promote economic and social rights.

10. Ending Discrimination in Self-Employment

For self-employed women such as own account workers, contributing family workers or women in cooperatives and micro-enterprises, equality mechanisms are needed to address the gender-based prejudices which infuse the low income they receive for their labour, products or services. Successful strategies in this area could focus on closing the business income gap between men's and women's micro-businesses. The World Bank Gender Action Plan includes support for affirmative action measures to support female micro-business entrepreneurs to gain access to greater incomes. These can include measures to provide women entrepreneurs with social protection, such as child-care supports or health services.

11. Enforcement and Monitoring

Effective enforcement means that the persons and groups who are discriminated against are empowered and enabled to achieve their rights found in equity laws and policies.⁴⁵ Such laws and mechanisms must be participative and transparent. Compliance requires constant renewal and transformation to address the ongoing changing nature and conditions of male and female work and the structure and con-

ditions of employers and the economy. Finally, and most critically for any legal framework, enforcement mechanisms must be accessible and resourced with complaint assistance so that vulnerable women workers can access their rights.⁴⁶

Built-in monitoring mechanisms are necessary to ensure that the law is implemented in a way that will effectively achieve women's labour market empowerment, and if the impact is not what was anticipated, that steps will be taken to change the legal mechanism to achieve the required goal. Given the scarcity of resources and the need to focus energies on implementable and effective mechanisms, this analysis is essential.

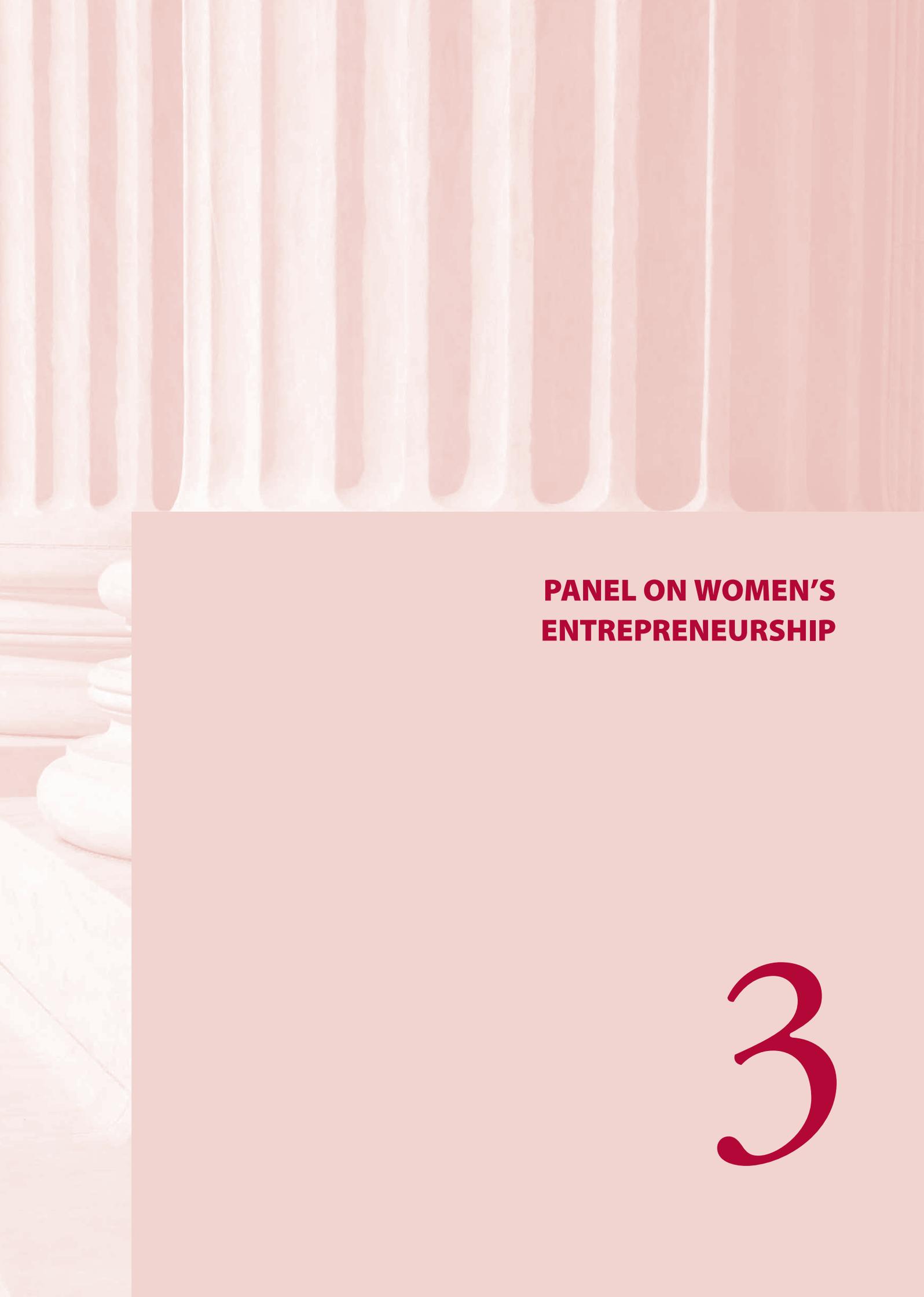
Conclusion

While parliamentarians face great challenges in carrying out their gender mainstreaming equality responsibilities, these challenges also provide great opportunities for them to make a critical contribution to ensuring that labour markets deliver the same economic outcomes to women and men. Working with women's representatives and social partners, the process of mainstreaming gender equality into parliamentary laws and institutions will be an ongoing one. ■

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**PANEL ON WOMEN'S
ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

3

Overview and Debate

The panel examined various ways and means of supporting women's entrepreneurship and women's economic autonomy, including through micro-credit initiatives. The panellists for this session were Ms. Tuldahar, Senior Gender Specialist, Bureau for Gender Equality, International Labour Organization (ILO); Dr. Al-Saleh, Member of the Shura Council, Bahrain; and Ms. Lukumu, Member of Parliament, Chairperson of the Committee on Equal Opportunities, Uganda. Ms. Tuladhar focused her presentation on the challenges and opportunities for the development of women's entrepreneurship. She outlined some of the approaches that the ILO takes to overcome these challenges. Dr. Al-Saleh outlined the Bahraini model used to support women's entrepreneurship. Ms. Lukumu outlined the situation in Uganda, focusing primarily on micro-credit initiatives.

It emerged from the interventions that **Women's Entrepreneurship Development** (WED) has become a major platform used by governments and development agencies to promote gender equality. Since the 1980s, the benefits of women's entrepreneurship have gained increasing recognition as a mechanism to reduce unemployment and contribute to national productivity. It has thus become an important strategy in the fight against poverty, especially for developing countries. Three main paradigms have driven the increase in small enterprise development and the proliferation of women's entrepreneurship. These paradigms are the liberal market paradigm, which sees women as efficient workers and central to market growth and the economy; the feminist empowerment paradigm, which focuses on the situation of poor, unemployed women and is opposed to gender subordination; and the interventionist poverty alleviation paradigm, which focuses on socially responsible growth. Women's entrepreneurship is crucial to the

development of states and should be promoted in line with these paradigms.

Women entrepreneurs are not a homogenous group: they differ greatly within and between countries. The diversity of the group is contingent on three main factors: access to resources, access to political power and the level of development that the state has reached. Furthermore, women entrepreneurs exist on different levels, which are traditionally classified as informal, formal and small enterprises. Targeting these women with suitable policies is therefore challenging, but it is not impossible because there are certain similarities in the constraints facing entrepreneurs at the various levels. Recent initiatives have identified five main categories of constraint that encompass the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs at the various levels:

1. access to credit and finance;
2. access to markets;
3. access to relevant education and specific business management training, as well as access to networks and associations;
4. weaknesses in the policy and legal framework, which lead to gender-insensitive macro-economic policies, for example, with regard to licensing procedures, tax policies and compliance procedures; and a
5. lack of cultural acceptance and recognition of women entrepreneurs' need to obtain work-life balance.

Any policy that aims to promote women entrepreneurs should recognize the existence of all these challenges. ILO actions take place within the framework of the **Women's Entrepreneurship Development and Gender Equality** (WEDGE) programme. The WEDGE programme is a combination of tech-

nical entrepreneurship development and addressing inequalities and barriers. It is a multidimensional approach based on gender mainstreaming, which employs affirmative action in order to address barriers and create jobs while maximizing profit. The programme succeeds by focusing on key areas and directing the different aspects of policy at target groups. The programme concentrates primarily on enhancing the potential for women entrepreneurship, and encouraging socio-political empowerment and capacity-building. It is important for programmes that aim to develop women's entrepreneurship to be based on "fundamentals of gender equality, which enable them to act against discrimination while working positively to secure opportunities for women." It is also important for such policies to target the most disadvantaged groups, such as women with disabilities.

"Thought must be given to increasing the representation of women in trade unions and decision-making bodies, as well as to reforming traditional social policies, which may be hostile to women entrepreneurs."

Women's entrepreneurship programmes should focus on investment and countering competition, but economic measures alone are not enough to guarantee sustainable progress. WED should therefore be framed in a wider context of general growth. Policies should aim to address the work environment and, in particular, to strengthen women's social inclusion. Thought must be given to increasing the representation of women in trade unions and decision-making bodies, as well as to reforming traditional social policies, which may be hostile to women entrepreneurs. In Bahrain, for example, women face a major problem in balancing their family and work responsibilities. One response to this challenge has been to support the growth of small to medium enterprises (SMEs). On a more fundamental level, the promotion of gender-sensitive education would also be a way of combating discriminatory stereotypes and practices.

There are various ways that economic policies may be used to help women overcome the problems caused by a lack of access to resources, capital and services. In Uganda, for instance, **micro-finance**

policies have provided women with small loans that give them the chance to build businesses and therefore generate diversified income. As such, micro-finance policies have been an important means of both women's empowerment and alleviating poverty. However, despite contributing to the promotion of gender equality, there are various problems in the structure of, and approach to, micro-finance policies which undermine their benefits.

Micro-finance policies have often ignored crucial social-cultural factors. Their approach is usually one which assumes that women entrepreneurs are a homogenous group for whom such policies would provide automatic, uniform and long-lasting benefits. However, by promoting such a view, the power-distributions in families and societies can often be overlooked, which can have significant consequences. The focus of micro-credit schemes, moreover, has traditionally been on small businesses and subsistence farmers, which means that a large percentage of people have been left out. Micro-finance policies have the potential to have the greatest benefits for the poorest, but the lack of access to credit is a major challenge that prevents women, particularly in rural areas, from participating in the schemes.

In addition to the problem of the lack of available credit, there is also a general lack of information regarding these policies. Thus, potential entrepreneurs are discouraged from participating either because they do not know about opportunities when they arise, or because they have been misinformed and consider it too risky to do so. This point relates to another criticism of micro-finance policies, which regards them as stand-alone ventures that are unconnected to any educational or training programmes. Recipients are thus frequently unable to use the resources to their advantage or may even misuse them and get into debt. This fear is accentuated by the repayment burden, which usually has a very limited grace period. Non-repayment of loans is, furthermore, often penalized by high interest rates, which can trap women in a downward debt spiral.

Micro-finance policies invariably have their problems, but their potential benefits, if carried out appropriately, mean that they should not be discarded. Micro-credit policies should take a more **integrated approach** and should be placed in the wider context of social empowerment. While acknowledging traditional family roles, policies must still target women. Women should be given more access

to credit as well as more control over how it is used. There should, moreover, be diversity in the specific programmes so that women can choose the scheme that best fits their situation and ambitions. Credit should be provided with a reasonable time frame for repayment. Crucially, more education is needed to teach recipients about interest rates and how best to invest their resources.

Plenary Debate

During the plenary session, it was mentioned that the ability of women to become entrepreneurs depends largely on their access to finance, education and logistical support. International organizations, governments and civil society all have a role to play in making these resources available. There are, however, other factors preventing women from starting their own businesses. These include individual factors such as fear, intimidation and a lack of self-confidence. Entrepreneurial ventures have traditionally been carried out by men. Women must therefore gain the confidence to try an unfamiliar career while simultaneously competing with rivals who may be more experienced. More support should therefore be given to women's networks that can guide women and offer assistance if needed.

Several participants noted that men and women are often treated differently over the repayment of

micro-finance loans. There is still pronounced discrimination in the system, which must be fought if policies are to be successful. Micro-finance policies and entrepreneurial schemes should be offered to all women in the areas where they are most needed, and should be tailored to fit each woman's circumstance. Moreover, such policies should be dedicated to the holistic development of women, and to improving not only their access to resources and employment opportunities, but also their levels of education and self-confidence. It was also noted that entrepreneurial development programs are crucial for the achievement of several fundamental economic, social and cultural rights.

It was agreed that creating an enterprise culture is an issue of immediate urgency, not just for women but for men as well. The rapid pace at which globalization is transforming the business culture necessarily threatens the success of SMEs as the markets become increasingly dominated by large companies. SMEs present the best way for women to access the market, however, and more must be done to protect this sector. As such, international agencies, particularly finance institutions, are valuable partners for governments attempting to strengthen SMEs. Inter-governmental relationships should thus be bolstered with the aim of implementing the international standards that account for the status of women and can deliver the reassurances they need. ■

Developing Women's Entrepreneurship: Challenges and Opportunities

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This presentation provides some general observations on the major issues regarding women's entrepreneurship and, a brief account of the International Labour Organization's (ILO) approach to women's entrepreneurship. Women's entrepreneurship in small-sector and micro-enterprises is making a significant contribution to national economies and to employment promotion. The employment potential of these sectors has been widely documented and data are widely available that testify to the importance of providing support and encouragement to such enterprises.

People often question the importance of women's entrepreneurship as opposed to enterprise development in general. The gender equality perspective is crucial to the whole development of women's entrepreneurship. In industrialized countries, developing women's entrepreneurship is seen as a key element in reducing welfare budgets and unemployment among women, while in developing countries it is seen as providing a path out of poverty. There is ample evidence from governments and development agencies across the political spectrum that promoting women's entrepreneurship is one of the main planks of gender equality policies.

The reasons behind micro- and small-enterprise development with women may be seen in the light of three paradigms. It could be seen within the liberal market paradigm, which sees women's entrepreneurship as contributing to the efficiency of and market growth in the national economy. Another paradigm is the feminist empowerment paradigm, which focuses on poor, self-employed women and workers in the informal sector and addresses gender subordination and poverty constraints. The third paradigm is an interventionist poverty alleviation paradigm, which focuses on socially responsible growth, in which there is an uneasy shift between policy relevant to growth

orientation and policy on the informal sector and the poorest self-employed workers. So, in response to the often-asked questions "why women's entrepreneurship?" and "what is so unique and so very significant about promoting women's entrepreneurship?" women's entrepreneurship can really be promoted within any of the above paradigms.

Women entrepreneurs across the globe are not a homogeneous group. For instance, their access to and control of resources in industrialized countries are very different to the situation in developing countries. There is also diversity within the same country, in access to political power, class, and access to benefits etc.

The International Labour Organization's research on women's entrepreneurship

Whether they are in the informal sector, micro-enterprises or small enterprises, there are some similarities in the kinds of constraints that women entrepreneurs face. ILO research findings have identified important constraints: in the informal sector micro-enterprises, costly and complex formalities and procedures, inappropriate operating locations and family responsibilities have been identified. In the formal sector micro-enterprises, it is difficulties with tax compliance and limited sources of financing, while in the small enterprises there is limited access to business development services, and a lack of term financing and working capital.

Across the three levels of entrepreneurship, it is possible to identify four categories of constraints. The first constraint, which looms very large, is access to credit and finance. This has been the case since the 1970s. Access to markets is the second constraint, and access to relevant education as well as specific

business management training and information, and business development services, networks and associations the third. The fourth, which is crucial, is the policy and legal framework: gender blind, gender-insensitive macro-economic policies, for example, with regard to registration and licensing procedures, tax policies, compliance procedures, and so on, to name just a few.

As gender specialists, ILO Bureau for Gender Equality are also very much concerned about the lack of cultural acceptance and recognition of women as entrepreneurs, and social restrictions that pose problems with the reconciliation of public and private life. Things have been changing in recent decades. Constraints have been relaxed and there is a much improved promotional approach to women's entrepreneurship, but research indicates that these problems remain to a great degree.

The International Labour Organization's approach to women's entrepreneurship

The ILO has been making three kinds of interventions with regard to women's entrepreneurship. We are trying to enhance women's entrepreneurship potential and to enhance social and political empowerment. The ILO also emphasizes capacity building among service providers. All these interventions are couched within the framework of the Women Entrepreneurship Development and Gender Equality (WEDGE) programme, which itself is ensconced in the InFocus Programme on Small Enterprise Development.

The WEDGE programme is a combination of technical entrepreneurship development and addressing inequalities and barriers. So women's entrepreneurship development includes affirmative actions to address inequalities and barriers, and looks at the whole enterprise life cycle of creating jobs and generating profit. This means that there is a combination of anti-discriminatory activities in order to promote women's entrepreneurship, and the technical activities. With regard to gender equality, this is similar to acting against discrimination but also includes positive aspects in which we work with ILO Boosting Employment through Small Enterprise Development (SEED) programmes to ensure that women and men have equal access to resources, support and opportunities to run their own businesses. Gender mainstreaming is

crucial to each and every activity carried out throughout the WEDGE programme.

The WEDGE programme has five strategies. The first strategy is to develop a knowledge base. The idea is to move from rhetoric to reality and from fiction to fact. A lot of research is therefore conducted. Pages and pages of research activities are involved in trying to develop a knowledge base.

The second strategy is promoting voice and representation. We are a tripartite constituent organization that includes employers, governments and workers, who assist with promoting voice and representation. The third strategy is developing innovative support services, the fourth is building strategic alliances with various parties, be they donors or financial institutions, and the fifth strategy, a most recent one, concerns measuring impact.

The WEDGE programme deals with four types of target group: women at the very beginning of creating their own businesses; women wishing to formalize their businesses; women wanting to expand businesses; and women with and without disabilities. The latter is the newest addition to our programme. Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB), Keep and Improve Your Business KEYB is a modular course designed to help women improve entrepreneurship, start and improve businesses, and understand and expand their businesses. A plethora of different entrepreneurship modules are designed to help entrepreneurs but, in this particular course, we attach importance to each of the target groups. One new module which has received positive feedback is on women with and without disabilities, [focuses especially on Ethiopia.

In terms of products and services, the WEDGE programme makes a distinction between those which support the potential of women entrepreneurs themselves, the kind of services that we could offer to women entrepreneurs for their growth; and the systemic institutional kind of services. For example, the module Get Ahead looks at entrepreneurs from a gender perspective and is a very gender-sensitive entrepreneurship training module. We put a lot of emphasis on improving exhibition skills. A recent conference in the informal economy sector provided an excellent example of how fair trade helps to boost women's entrepreneurship in terms of both visibility and greater membership association, so we recognize this as a very important service. The WEDGE programme has a Women Entrepreneurship Devel-

opment (WED) capacity guide, which helps to build associations and to institutionalize women's business networks. Another is Female and Male Operated Services (FAMOS), which I am particularly interested in because of the gender audit framework which the FAMOS checklist follows. Gender audit is a process and tool which measures in a participatory fashion the gender mainstreaming status of a particular institution. FAMOS has integrated gender audit into the entrepreneurship module and, in combining the two, has produced what is called the FAMOS checklist, which examines an institution from the point of view of whether it is a gender-sensitive entrepreneurial association.

“It is not enough to have enterprises; we also examine work relations and workplace activities within the workplace, whether it be a formal or informal structure.”

Barriers at start-up and to growth, access to markets, access to resources, and strengthened social inclusion are all very important from the perspective of the ILO, because one of the things the ILO is arguing for is socially just and equitable access to resources. Then we have to foster a supportive environment in terms of policy and culture. This is the kind of framework that gives us a backdrop against which we initiate all our activities and our approaches. We couch all of our work on employment with gender

equality and decent work as a central concern and, therefore, because they are of central concern, they are a central concern in economic policies, fiscal trading investment and regulatory frameworks. That is one item that we like to emphasize.

It is not enough to have enterprises; we also examine work relations and workplace activities within the workplace, whether it be a formal or informal structure. Social and family policies are very important – parental leave, childcare support, flexibility in the workplace, time arrangements, and so on. Employers' organizations have played a crucial role in promoting and organizing entrepreneurship through policy dialogue and training for women as a means of improving employment opportunities.

Three questions for discussion or debate come to mind. First, we do not want women entrepreneurs to remain micro entrepreneurs, do we? Do we promote growth-orientated entrepreneurs and, if so, how, why and to what point? Second, getting the policy environment right is crucial. What type of initiative (or strategy and process) can policymakers take to support and promote a legislative framework? This is the second major element in the whole entrepreneurship development issue, and the ILO has been engaging in numerous policy dialogues in many countries. The last question, which seems to be the most difficult and also the most important, is how best to address the gender-based barriers and constraints faced by women entrepreneurs throughout the enterprise life cycle – and I would emphasize the enterprise life cycle because that is where the problems seem to arise. ■

Women's Role as Innovators: Bahraini Women in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

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Introduction

The attention paid to the situation of women in the Kingdom of Bahrain is an integral part of the overall interest in human development, since the development of modern society cannot be measured without taking account of women's social, cultural, economic and political situation. In that regard, we should mention that the number of girls in education is almost the same as the number of boys, up to secondary level.

Bahrain has a population of 760 168, comprising native peoples and foreigners from all over the world. The population is divided between 40 islands, situated in the middle of the Arab Persian Gulf, near the coast of Saudi Arabia, the total surface area of which amounts to around 711.9 square kilometres.

Bahrain is situated on a cultural crossroads. It has been home to several civilizations, which have all left their social, economic and cultural mark. The fact that education began early in Bahrain (the first boys' school was established in 1919, and the first girls' school in 1928), and that public education is free, has played an important role in developing cultural and economic awareness among Bahraini women, and means that the illiteracy rate among the elderly of both sexes is less than 4 per cent.

Employment for women is not a new phenomenon in Bahrain. Since the 1920s, women have been participating actively in a wide range of small jobs to improve their income. At that time, Bahraini women looked after their families, when their husbands left for around 4 months at a time to work as fishermen. Jobs done by women vary from manual work, to professional jobs, to small jobs in trade. Women also met a need in the market by doing jobs such as sewing, weaving, small-scale trade in animal products and homemade food. They had jobs in hair-dressing, massage and midwifery, predominantly

female-oriented professions, but they were also known to participate in activities such as weaving and basketry.

When public education began in 1928, women began to be employed in the public sector, mainly in education and healthcare. In the early 1950s women began to get regular employment in the private sector. In 1952 a woman was granted a business registration for the first time. At almost the same time, Bahraini women began to participate in voluntary work, and establish associations. The first women's association in Bahrain and the Arab Persian Gulf was founded in 1955.

Legislation has contributed to the legal protection of employment for women in both the public and private sectors. The laws and legislation of the Kingdom, such as the National Action Charter and the Constitution, as amended in 2002, firmly state the principle of equality before the law in respect of the rights and duties of women in the public domain, without discrimination on grounds of race, background, language, religion or beliefs, and this legitimises the role of women in development. Bahrain's accession to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 2002 has played an important role and has encouraged women to participate on the road to development.

The Labour Code, No. 23 of 1976, and its amendments, also provide guarantees in respect of equality between men and women in the definition of "public official" and equality of pay; the term "employee" is defined as a man or a woman working for a salary and working for an employer and under his or her direction and supervision. The Labour Code also devotes a chapter to specific women's rights, in order to help reconcile women's duties and responsibilities

as mothers and as workers (maternity leave, breastfeeding hours, and unpaid leave for childcare). Pursuant to the international labour instruments to which Bahrain is party, women are not employed in jobs that are dangerous or harmful to the health, or in night jobs.

1. Bahraini initiatives to promote small and medium-sized enterprises

In order to build a progressive and developed society, it is essential to ensure equality between women and men at the economic, social and cultural levels, through practical strategies developed by all those concerned, including the state, civil society, the private sector and NGOs.

The public and private sectors, believing in the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises in the advancement of the national economy and in job creation for men and women alike, have supported these enterprises for their influence on the development of the independence and administrative capacities of each individual.

The following institutions have contributed greatly to the promotion of small and medium-sized enterprises:

The Economic Development Council

A team has been formed through collaboration between the Economic Development Council and the Bahrain Development Bank, and under the supervision of the Director of the Central Bank of Bahrain, to facilitate funding for small and medium enterprises; the Bahrain Development Bank's capital has been increased to fifty million Bahraini dinars. Mechanisms have also been developed to improve the process of granting loans.

The Ministry of Industry and Commerce

a. The Bahraini model of training and development for heads of small and medium-sized enterprises:

A plan has been developed to train heads of small and medium-sized enterprises, and give them the competences necessary to manage them, and to help diversify the Kingdom's economic foundations. This plan is the result of cooperation between the Ministry of Industry and Commerce and the United Nations

Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), represented by the Arab Regional Centre for Entrepreneurship and Investment Training, as well as the Bahrain Development Bank (see section III, the Bahraini model of training and development for heads of small and medium-sized enterprises).

b. The Vocational Training Institute

In 1990, The Ministry of Development and Industry proposed the launch of an apprenticeship programme for young people of both sexes, to train them and encourage them to work in their area of expertise and gain a stable source of income. As a result, the Manama Industrial College was turned into a vocational training centre. The centre opened in April of the same year, and has hosted numerous exhibitions and projects.

c. The Jasra Handicraft Centre

Concern about preserving the popular heritage of the Kingdom of Bahrain has led to the establishment of the Jasra Handicraft Centre to maintain traditional handicraft trades, such as earthenware, making wooden chests, pottery and weaving.

The Jasra Vocational Training Centre will open in early 2008, and will play an important role in the Gulf region. The Centre will be responsible for training young people in a wide range of traditional handicraft trades, such as carpentry, cabinet making, metalwork, copper-, silver- and goldsmithing, as well as traditional cookery.

The Ministry of Social Development

The Ministry for Social Development has had a modern outlook on changing the policy for supporting projects for productive families from "supervision" to "growth and development". It has established the "Capital Collective for Productive Families", which is the first of its type to provide services for micro-enterprises and productive family enterprises, to enable them to build their capacity and increase production, strive towards a high level of professionalism and trade, with higher value.

This Collective provides administrative, accounting and training services. It also helps promote products by making premises available at low rent and organizing exhibitions for the benefit of the productive families involved in the Collective.

The Supreme Council for Women

Owing to its belief in the importance of the economic participation of Bahraini women, the Supreme Council for Women pays particular attention to economic issues, which it has made a main focus of the national strategy for the promotion of women and the plan for the economic independence of women, which it has recently begun to implement.

The following strategic objectives for economic issues have been set:

- Formulation and implementation of economic policies;
- Implementation of development and training programmes for women, to target women's emancipation;
- Enabling women to benefit from equitable social security, the productivity of which is multifaceted;
- Developing programmes in cooperation with State institutions, financial institutions and regional and international credit institutions to improve the production capacity of women and increase their sources of income.

Civil society

A number of civil society institutions have been established and have contributed to promoting the position of women in the economic sphere. These institutions strive to improve creativity and innovation in the context of small and medium-sized enterprises. These institutions include:

- The Bahrain Businesswomen's Association;
- The Entrepreneurs' Association;
- The Association of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises;
- The Young Entrepreneurs' Association.

2. The Bahraini model of training and development for heads of small and medium-sized enterprises

In 2000, Bahrain adopted a precise model, which has no equivalent, for training heads of small and medium-sized enterprises, which shows that the country is making efforts to adopt strong economic ideas. Given the effectiveness of this model, and its capacity for

producing reliable results, it has been adopted in a number of other countries, such as Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Tunisia, Sudan, China and Uruguay.

The role of women has not been forgotten in this project, and women have contributed considerably to its success both as trainers and trainees.

The model is implemented in the following four stages:

Stage one: Training and capacity-building

This stage lasts from four to five weeks, during which time the trainee learns the basic theories and practices that ensure the success of a project. This stage enables trainees to meet heads of businesses who have followed the same training programme and who have succeeded in creating their own businesses. It also enables them to meet those in charge of different Ministries, who explain to them the licensing systems and laws for small and medium-sized businesses.

This stage focuses on:

1. Instilling the necessary know-how to be able to choose a suitable project;
2. Helping to develop an action plan;
3. Getting the most out of existing funding sources;
4. Becoming familiar with modern methods of managing small enterprises.

Stage two: Technological advice and provisions

This stage aims to give trainees technical and financial advice, and assist them to finalize a business plan. It also helps them make technological choices and establish partnerships with foreign investors through the Investment and Technology Promotion Offices of UNIDO.

Stage three: Financial links

This stage of the project aims to define potential financial sources and to help the project leader obtain credit that corresponds to the needs of the project and the investment capacities of the head of the enterprise.

Stage four: Upgrade and growth programmes

The Working Group of the Bahraini Centre for the Development of Emerging Industries has set itself the task of helping heads of enterprises to obtain the

equipment they need, recruit staff, get their business up and running for a trial period and become fully operational. Secretarial, administrative and commercial services are also provided, as well as specialized consultancy services, sponsorship and daily monitoring.

This specific environment, i.e. the sponsorship centre, helps to increase growth among new enterprises, and helps them to succeed and keep functioning. Experience has shown that sponsorship of small emerging enterprises increases their chances of success from 45–59 per cent to around 87 per cent. This can contribute to meeting development goals and recouping economic and social losses caused by the failure of small and medium-sized enterprises.

3. Why is there such an interest in women's access to small and medium-sized enterprises?

In order to change attitudes towards women, women's work patterns must be changed and their self esteem must be promoted. Women unquestionably prefer working in the public sector, and in particular in the service ministries, such as the Ministry for Education, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry for Social Affairs. In contrast, the private sector counts a small number of women despite the large number who graduate from schools of management and technology, as well as those who specialize in sciences.

These stereotypes with regard to the private sector are changing, however, as female access to the labour market develops. As Table 1 shows, women represent a high percentage of the population active in the public sector. This figure was 65.5 per cent in the public sector and 29.4 per cent in the private sector in 1991. By contrast, in 2005, women accounted for 45 per cent of the public sector and 55 per cent of the private sector. This change shows women's desire to access the private sector in order to achieve partnerships that move towards economic development.

In 2001, 95 per cent of economically active men and 96 per cent of economically active women were employees. Around 6 per cent of men and 3 per cent

of women were in employer positions, while around 4 per cent of men and 1 per cent of women were self-employed.

Education has contributed to economic development, particularly since it has become a partner to economic force, rather than being in competition with it. If a woman cannot work owing to her family situation, she always has the possibility, if she has innovation skills, to join the labour market through small and medium-sized enterprises.

The experience of small and medium-sized enterprises has shown that women are capable of succeeding. Some Bahraini women who have achieved success joined the labour market feeling shy and fearing that they would fail. Today, those women manage their businesses with professionalism. Some of them have won awards from a wide variety of sources.

What pushes women to go beyond this difficulty?

Several different sources were asked this question, and the answer was that Bahraini women have an ability to make their way in a man's world. They are also able to set up businesses with a small amount of capital, and diversify their investments. It is clear that creativity is one of the sources of economic growth.

4. Difficulties and obstacles faced

Despite the efforts made by the State and civil society to promote the economic emancipation of women and enable them to participate in the management of the national economy, difficulties and obstacles that prevent women from proving their economic and development and making progress, and which thereby make them withdraw from economic activity, still remain. These difficulties include:

- Lack of financial resources;
- Lack of experience or lack of competences;
- Poor planning;
- Inability to find a niche in the market;
- Unwise investment, such as the purchase of expensive equipment;
- Work not conducted rigorously enough;
- Lack of State support for commercialization, low sales figures;
- Fierce competition owing to product quality or price differences;
- Poor choice of business location, mismanagement of stocks, over-investment in physical assets, lack of credit, unforeseen personal use of project funds.

Table 1: Situation of women in the public and private sectors

Private sector	Public sector	Year
29.4	67.5	1991
55	45	2004

5. Prospective approaches and providing support for Bahraini women

Small and medium-sized enterprises are a major tool for moving families out of poverty and helping them become productive and self-sufficient. It is therefore important that the competent authorities pay close attention to these enterprises for the sake of sustainable development, by:

- Taking account of the difference between the sexes when formulating policies for economic development projects, which is something the ARSIT Programme has not taken into consideration. The studies that we have been shown have not been conducted from a gender perspective either;
- Understanding the relationship between international laws and institutions and investment on one hand, and national economic policies on the other, without which it is not possible to focus on the creativity or the emancipation of women;
- Emphasizing competition and investment policies in the main spheres of female creativity, such as agriculture and services.

6. Recommendations

- The Bahraini model of training and development for heads of small and medium-sized enterprises is an important aspect of women's economic emancipation. We hope that this project will reach as many Bahraini women who have difficulties in their lives as possible.
- We hope that projects to reform education and training will arouse considerable interest, so that students can prepare to establish these types of enterprise later on. These enterprises will help make economic emancipation a reality for women;
- We hope that financial assistance and small-scale credit will be granted to women without hindrance, and without having to go through discouraging bureaucratic procedures;
- Women need childcare facilities to be close at hand so that they can reconcile their domestic and professional obligations;
- Collaboration between State institutions and civil society is desirable in order to overcome the obstacles that prevent them from being advised appropriately, and to obtain the necessary assistance for commercializing their products. ■

Women and Work: Strategies for the Future, Microfinance and Women's Empowerment in Uganda

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Introduction

Microfinance, or micro-credit, has been described as the world's most powerful weapon against poverty. It provides people in the developing world with small loans that give them the chance to build businesses and therefore generate income. Currently, two billion people worldwide have no access to basic financial services, which includes bank accounts, insurance and pension schemes as well as loans. Microfinance is a way to promote enterprise among people who would otherwise be dependent on aid.

Micro-lending often starts in small villages where family members and friends get together to form money-sharing groups. According to Mary Coyle, Director of the International Institute at St. Francis Xavier University, Nova Scotia, Canada, who has studied the history of micro-credit, these savings clubs can be traced to all parts of the world: "They have operated for centuries probably since the introduction of currency". In most Western or developed countries, it is relatively easy to obtain credit from large banks or money-lending institutions. In the developing world, however, where many people lack steady employment, a credit history or collateral, there is often no way for legitimate small businesses to obtain a loan. In many ways, microfinance has changed all this.

Generally defined as small lending to the rural poor in developing countries, microfinance has made great strides in the latter half of the 20th century. Although the award of the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize to Dr. Muhammad Yunus, one of the founders of modern microfinance, has helped to push the industry even further into the spotlight, the idea of microfinance has existed for hundreds of years in many regions and in many forms.

Microfinance and women's empowerment

Participation in microfinance worldwide is predominantly by women. This fact underscores its potential to promote gender equity and empower women. Many microfinance institutions consider women to be a better credit risk than men and loans made to women have been found to have wider household-level benefits than those given to men. Despite concerns over the potential for a double burden being placed on women as both caregivers and new entrepreneurs, evidence supports a positive association between microfinance and the enhanced health and social status of women.

However, donor funding for microfinance has generally been conditional and aimed at achieving financial sustainability in the short term. Although short term financial sustainability is desirable in order to provide access to financial services on a sufficient scale to meet demand, these programmes can only be part of the solution to achieving poverty reduction and empowerment for women. In the 1990s, Ugandan farmers became interested in microfinancial resources (MFRs) that were being promoted nationally as an important means for poverty alleviation and for women's empowerment. In the Arua and Mukono districts, households diversified their income-generating strategies with the help of formal, semi-formal and informal financial institutions. However, little has been done to assess either the position of women in credit/savings initiatives or the capacity of MFRs to empower women. No studies in Uganda have used a methodology that adequately defines and measures women's empowerment. Existing studies tend to focus on defining a set of factors that affect women's access to microfinance, and these give the impression that women are a homogenous group and that

microfinance would provide them with automatic and uniform benefits.

In Uganda, both men and women use informal financial groups more than any other source of microfinance. However, the benefits are significantly influenced by other socio-cultural factors. For example, participation in informal financial groups increases women's decision-making power over non-traditional matters – such as household income control – but not over what are traditionally women's issues – such as agricultural production. On the other hand, rural men's empowerment is associated with their use of informal loans from individuals such as friends, relatives or merchants. For women, individual-level factors, such as occupation (farming, trading), and household-level factors, notably household hardship, have a profound influence on women's empowerment in both traditional and non-traditional spheres of decision making. In contrast, men's empowerment is associated mainly with their gender rather than household-level conditions. An integrated approach to microfinance delivery in Uganda should therefore be advocated because integrated informal sources offer the best opportunities for rural farmers in general and women in particular.

At the Eighth Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting (BWAMM), held in Kampala, Uganda, on 11–14 June 2007, which 32 countries attended, microfinance and innovative financing were identified as ways to track money for gender equality. The delegates acknowledged the critical role of microfinance for women's empowerment and called for greater involvement of women in managing microfinance. Given the level of existing good practice across the Commonwealth, they also emphasized the importance of sharing the lessons learned.

Access to micro-credit

Lack of access to credit is often seen as a major problem for poor women in Uganda, especially in the rural areas. The problem is not only lack of availability, but also that most women do not have enough information about where, how and when to access credit facilities. They have all sorts of beliefs about the operations of the service providers, some generated from their own experiences and others from hearsay. This often leads them to believe that they are better off without credit, especially if it might lead to the loss

of the little property they have. The fear of being a debtor is especially pronounced in the rural areas. Therefore, providing women with relevant information about where and how micro-credit operates is of paramount importance when addressing the issue of access. Micro-credit is often seen as a standalone venture with no integration into education projects. This means that even when women do gain access, they are unable to use the scheme to their advantage.

Control over the credit

The level of empowerment generated during the process is central to determining whether women have control over their credit. Stories of men taking the money that women get from either a group or a microfinance institution are very common. This presents a challenge that must be addressed. Microfinance institutions have increased women's access to credit but in a number of cases have not followed up to assess the extent to which these women have maintained control over the resources received. This scenario can further burden women because, as the assumed beneficiaries, they remain responsible for repayment.

Loan utilization

Women need support to ensure that the loan improves their economic situation rather than worsening it. Supplementary technical and other related training should be provided. Such training could examine some potential projects to be undertaken by recipients of credit.

Loan repayment

As well as a lack of knowledge about how to use the credit wisely, non-repayment can also be attributed to the high level of interest charged and to unfair repayment periods. The repayment period has a direct bearing on the kind of intervention that can be taken on, but this is rarely taken into account. Interest rates, apart from being high, also present a challenge in that most women who access credit through these schemes are illiterate, and therefore have no idea how they are calculated. In this regard, women should be given the opportunity to learn how to read and write. There should also be a focus on how interest

rates are calculated so that recipients can decide whether to take out the loan collectively, to negotiate for better rates or even not to proceed. Reading and writing skills would also enable recipients to keep better records, reducing the possibility of being cheated and allowing them to monitor their income and expenditure and determine their profits.

Recommendations

Women accessing micro-credit have made the following recommendations that should be adopted if micro-credit is to achieve its objectives:

- Introduce family loans, where a husband and wife are directly responsible and accountable for the loan issued to them;
- Incorporate technical and other related training to ensure effective credit utilization;
- Allow for flexibility; for instance, repayment intervals/periods could be determined according to the investment opportunities available in that community or seasonal variations;
- Ensure timely issue of credit depending on what the beneficiaries want to use the credit for.

The women also recommended that loans should have a reasonable grace period to enable them to repay the loan while saving some of the credit.

The achievements of microfinance

Microfinance programmes not only give women and men access to savings and credit, but also reach millions of people worldwide by bringing them together regularly in organized groups. These programmes can contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment. Microfinance programmes increase the capacity of women to earn an income, initiating a "virtuous spiral" of economic empowerment, increased well-being for women and their families, and wider social and political empowerment.

Microfinance services and groups involving men also have the potential to question and significantly change men's attitudes and behaviour as an essential component of achieving gender equality. Gender equality and women's empowerment in turn are integral components of pro-poor development and the strengthening of civil society.

Women have been able to achieve the following through interventions by NGOs, such as Action Aid Uganda:

- Easy mobilization of communities, especially women. The processes also ensure group cohesion. This means that women are brought together to obtain credit but are able to generate other development ideas at the same time;
- Provision of opportunities for further discussion and generation of ideas around utilization, the availability of investment opportunities and marketing options – micro-credit is not an end in itself.;
- Equipping women with reading, writing, numeracy and record keeping skills, which they continue to practice;
- Enabling women, through the discussion process, to begin making their own decisions on issues that affect them;
- Forming a critical mass which enables women to lobby and advocate for their rights;
- Increased access to and control over credit by women;
- Provision of opportunities for acquisition of productive assets, such as land, by women;
- Enhancement of women's empowerment because their experiences can be used in other development interventions.

The challenges that women face in accessing micro-credit through interventions

- The limited involvement of men in their activities leads them to either hijack the process or undermine it;
- The level of funding extended to the groups is very limited;
- Low levels of literacy make it difficult for the women to keep records;
- Some women have become overburdened as a result of their contact with micro-credit;
- There are cases reported of men neglecting their responsibilities as a result of their women acquiring credit;
- There is the possibility of the process being hijacked by other people who have been attracted by the credit, for example, the middle poor;

- The tendency to treat the interventions as a literacy package limits their use. In such cases, the focus is on record keeping alone, but analysis could help women in other areas such as with assessing investment opportunities and mapping out marketing strategies.

The detractors of microfinance

Despite the fact that micro-credit has become something of a celebrated cause for its potential to help the developing world, there are some serious and credible criticisms. Critics of micro-credit say that many of the poorest of the poor do not qualify for a loan because they pose too much risk; and that those who do qualify use much of their loan not for business, but for simple needs such as food for their families.

Others insist that microfinance is not a complete solution, charging that those stakeholders who benefit from the industry overstate its value in order to keep the model going. Institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have also been criticized for channelling money into micro-credit institutions that could have been used to fund education, health or other basic social infrastructure needs.

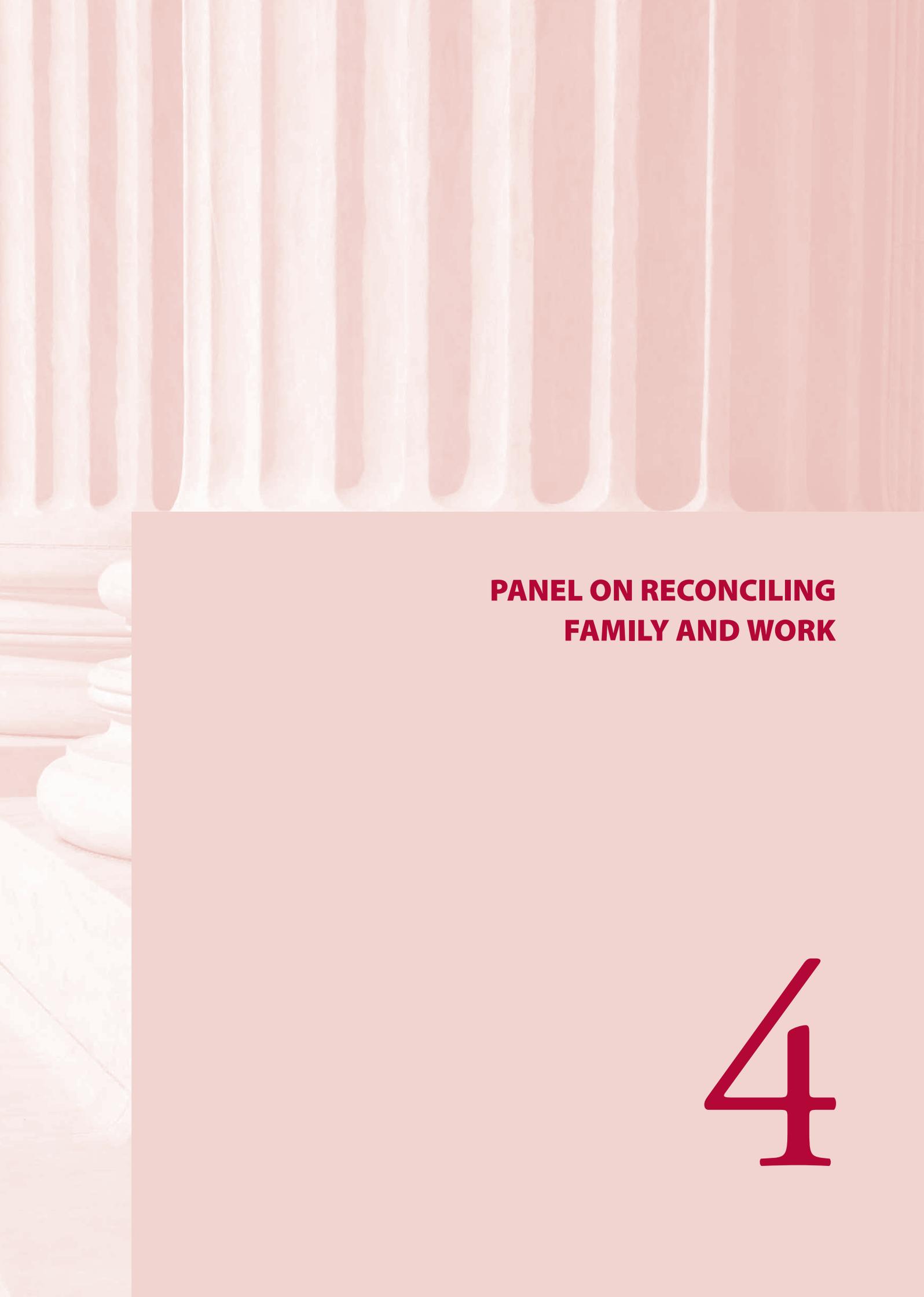
Jonathan Morduch's paper *Does Microfinance Really Help the Poor? New Evidence from Flagship Programs in Bangladesh* (Princeton University Working Paper, 1998) questions the real impact of the industry in helping the poor: "Households that are eligible to borrow and have access to the microfinance programs do not have notably higher consumption levels than control households, and for the most part, their children are no more likely to be in school". Murdoch also found that micro-credit does not reach those who

are truly destitute, and that those who benefit most are already above the poverty line.

Conclusion

Despite some successes, the evidence indicates that even in financially sustainable programmes, benefits for women cannot be assumed. On the contrary, many programmes report reductions in their ability to ensure that women benefit following the introduction of policies to increase financial sustainability. Women's empowerment is not addressed even in the new poverty agenda for inclusive microfinance. Moreover, funding for programmes which place prime emphasis on women's empowerment continues to decrease.

The evidence to date shows that if microfinance programmes are to make significant contributions to pro-poor development and strengthening civil society, they need to develop explicit gender strategies to address the needs of women. These gender strategies need to look beyond just increasing women's access to savings and credit, to organizing self-help groups to look strategically at how gender equality and women's empowerment can be promoted. Moreover, the focus should be on developing a diverse microfinance sector where different types of organization – NGOs, microfinance institutions and the formal banking sector – all have gender policies adapted to the needs of their particular target groups and their institutional roles and capacities. These types of organizations must work collaboratively as part of an inclusive financial sector in order to make significant contributions to gender equality and pro-poor development. ■

The background of the page is a light pink color. On the left side, there is a vertical strip showing a white radiator and a stack of books. The radiator has vertical slats, and the books are stacked on top of each other.

**PANEL ON RECONCILING
FAMILY AND WORK**

4

Overview and Debate

The panel discussed the growing work-family tensions stemming from, in particular, the intensification of labour, demographic change and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Examples were provided of initiatives taken to address these tensions. The panellists for this session were Ms. Cassirer, Senior Technical Officer, Conditions of Work and Employment Programme, the ILO; Ms. Koning, Equality Officer, International Trade Union Confederation; Ms. Gonzalez, Assistant Director, International Trade Union Confederation; and Mr. Recondo, Member of the Chamber of Deputies, Chile. Ms. Cassirer provided a general overview of the issues and challenges facing women when attempting to reconcile work and family responsibilities. Ms. Koning and Ms. Gonzalez addressed the same issue from the perspective of trade unions, and Mr. Recondo presented the Chilean experience.

Ms. Cassirer outlined the situation for women around the world. Although it is, in general, the women and the poor in rural areas who invest most time in unpaid work, reconciling the demands of work and family is nonetheless a global concern affecting both industrial and non-industrial countries. This is especially true since the demands of unpaid work are increasing across the board. This trend is linked largely to four main factors. First, family structures are changing, in that there has been an increase in the number of single parents who must adapt to their new roles as both wage earner and care giver. The effect that globalization has had by increasing the number of economic migrants means that families must frequently support their hard-hit relatives. These changes are, moreover, taking place in the context of an ageing population and a greater proportion of elderly people requiring care. The ability of families to cope with these demands, especially

during health epidemics, while earning a wage is thus severely limited. This situation has been exacerbated by recent spending cuts made to public services such as health care.

The **demands of work** in the formal sector have also increased. Employees are required to work longer hours in order to keep up with the competition. Since there is a greater need for family income in market economies, more women have joined the workforce, sometimes balancing multiple jobs. As the cost of living in urban areas continues to rise, employees are forced to live further away from their workplace. This increases the length of their commute and decreases the amount of time available for unpaid work. Mr. Recondo explained that despite the introduction of legislation and policies designed to protect workers in Chile, such situations are still the reality for many women.

Ms. Gonzalez emphasized how there has, in general, been a **lack of state initiatives** designed to protect workers with family responsibilities. International organizations, such as the ILO, thus have a crucial role to play in creating suitable frameworks for action that enable workers to participate in paid work in such a way that does not conflict with their other responsibilities. This is especially true for women workers who need protection during pregnancy and after childbirth. Ms. Koning pointed out that the general perception is that pregnancy acts as an obstacle to productivity. This perspective is reflected in state policies, which often do not invest enough in providing for maternity leave, medical benefits or employment protection. Moreover, governments have taken few initiatives to combat discrimination against mothers in the workplace. Nor have they given much protection to foreign workers who arrive as economic migrants. Many of the improvements made in this

regard have come either from trade unions or international initiatives such as CEDAW, the Millennium Development Goals and the Beijing Platform for Action.

However, such policies and measures do not necessarily translate into improvements in working conditions. Consequently, women are frequently forced to work part-time, or even to withdraw from paid work entirely, in order to cope with their responsibilities at home. Increasingly, however, women find themselves operating in conditions that do not meet the criteria of decent work, sacrificing suitable wages and social protection for employment in the informal sector.

“The increasing number of women in the workforce has changed the composition of trade unions and thus affected their traditions, cultures and agendas.”

Other ways of coping with the increasing demands of unpaid work include women enlisting the help of older children or relying on relatives or domestic workers. These are, however, all individual solutions that would create global concerns regarding wages, protection and rights if any attempt were made at regularization. Ms. Gonzalez highlighted the exploitation of domestic workers who usually do not benefit from the protection afforded under national laws. Since applying regulations on domestic workers would not be conducive to the goals of economic growth and efficiency, the dilemma persists.

The increasing number of women in the workforce has changed the composition of trade unions and thus affected their traditions, cultures and agendas. Women are increasingly regarded as agents for change. The inclusion of larger numbers of **migrant workers and domestic workers** has brought gender equality on to the agenda of trade unions, which are increasingly targeting ‘invisible’ workers in the informal sector.

Chile is a country where unpaid work is greatly valued and where many steps have been taken to improve the situation for women in order to help them balance work and family responsibilities. According to Mr. Recondo, legislation has been used in Chile to support a system of economic incentives that en-

courages employers to improve working conditions for employees. States should prioritize the need to ensure that women are afforded the protection they need in order to give birth and raise children as well as participate in the labour market.

Plenary Debate

Several participants noted that despite the existence of national laws and international treaties pertaining to gender equality and positive discrimination, little progress has been made in this regard. In Egypt, the private sector tends to prefer men over women simply because employers are aware of the large burden of social responsibility that women have and men do not. In order to combat such mentalities, parliamentarians need to ensure that legislation is properly implemented. Without harnessing **political will**, however, no progress can be made.

Participants noted that gender equality is not the only concern of societies today. A challenge still facing parliamentarians is thus how to balance considerations of gender equality with concerns for **wider economic and social stability**. Legislation should be able to reconcile the interests of all the actors involved.

In order to help women reconcile family and work obligations, developmental models should be adopted which are based on an understanding of the **multiple roles** that women have as well as the valuable contribution they make to the economy. Any progress that has been achieved so far in helping women balance their commitments has been uneven, with noticeable discrepancies between rural and urban areas. There is thus a need for a more integrative, holistic approach at the national level. The participant from Cyprus highlighted that: “The reconciliation of family and work is not a private issue between men and women; it is an issue which has social dimensions. We, as parliamentarians, have to cultivate this understanding.”

Several participants highlighted the role that **trade unions** can play in stimulating social dialogue in order to cultivate a better understanding of the situation for women workers. The help of international organizations should be enlisted to assist with formulating and guiding the implementation of policies in conformity with international standards.

At the national level, it was proposed that **school curricula** should be reformed to include basic infor-

mation on legal instruments. The media should also do more to raise awareness regarding issues of social security, protection schemes, and the rights and duties of men and women. Several participants expressed an interest in seeing men take more responsibility for

unpaid work. On this note, Ms. Cassirer concluded the session by stating that “shared responsibility must come within a framework of state responsibility. Women, men, workers cannot assume the burden alone.” ■

Reconciling Work and Family Responsibilities: Issues and Challenges

Ms. Naomi Cassirer

Senior Technical Officer, Conditions of Work and Employment Programme, ILO

This presentation begins with the general observation that when we talk about work, we are not talking only about paid work, which is work that we do for remuneration, but also about unpaid economic work and unpaid care work.

Unpaid economic work consists of procuring inputs and producing for use as well as for the market, so unpaid agricultural family work, subsistence production and collecting basic necessities such as fuel and water are all included as unpaid economic work. Unpaid care work, on the other hand, is not included in the Gross Domestic Product. It is the work that is required for household maintenance: the cleaning, shopping, cooking and the care providing for infants and children, the sick and disabled, and for older relatives, and so on.

Of course, there are only 24 hours in a day, and the amount of time that a person can devote to paid work is limited by the amount of time they spend on unpaid work. The amount of time that a person or a household spends on unpaid work is determined by many different factors, most notably the extent to which public services and infrastructure are available. How far do you have to go to get water? Is it available from a tap, or only at certain times from over the hill? How far do you have to travel to collect your household's basic necessities? What kind of support is there in the form of childcare and other types of unpaid work that free up time to engage in paid work? How much do you have to pay for health care? Are healthcare services available and, if so, how far away are they? If they are not available or affordable, your household will have to spend time providing these basic necessities and care.

The amount of time spent on unpaid work also depends on: family income, which affects the ability to purchase services or processed food; family com-

position, the number of adults available to provide care; the number of dependants who need care; and the level of particular needs, such as those of young children, the sick and disabled, and so on.

Increasing demands of paid and unpaid work

Several trends indicate that the demands of unpaid work are increasing, hitting women and the poor particularly hard in certain countries and in certain contexts. These trends include changing family structures and the rise of single-parent households, particularly single-mother households, in which there are fewer adult members to provide help with either paid or unpaid work. Research has examined the decline in extended family supports, which were once a traditional source of help with childcare, shopping, cooking, and so on. In many cases extended families have been disrupted by migration, or are themselves pressed by economic need to participate in paid work. Some countries are rapidly ageing, increasing demands for care from younger family members, typically women. Epidemics such as HIV/AIDS in some countries have increased the number of sick people needing health care, while cutbacks in spending on health and the public services have increased the amount of unpaid care work that households are required to provide for the health and well-being of their dependants.

Even as the demands of unpaid work in many cases become heavier, the demands of paid work are intensifying for many families as well. Recent decades have witnessed increasing labour force participation by women, because of the greater economic and educational opportunities for them, but also because households and women face greater need for income.

Reports from the ILO Conditions of Work Employment Programme highlight very long working hours in some countries, and in some sectors, such as the service sector and the retail and wholesale trades. There is also a rise of multiple job-holding. Many workers are spending considerable time commuting to and from work. Informal economy employment is extensive, characterized by poor working conditions, low pay, a lack of social protection, and a lack of representation and rights. All this suggests that both men and women are devoting more time to paid work, facing great challenges finding decent work, and finding less time for unpaid family responsibilities and care.

Shaping social policy to both support unpaid family responsibilities and facilitate access to decent work is essential. Currently, women tend to spend much more time on unpaid work than men, while men tend to spend more time on paid work than women; the poor tend to spend more time on unpaid work than the better off; and households in rural areas spend more time on unpaid work than urban households. Not only are the disparities in unpaid care work and in paid work inequitable, they bear negative implications for social goals of poverty reduction, of gender, race and ethnic equality, and of development in general as I will return to later.

The ILO's International Labour Standards provide frameworks for action to address these growing challenges. Of particular relevance to our meeting today are the International Labour Convention and Recommendation on Workers with Family Responsibilities (C 156 and R 165; 1981) which provide guidance on policies and programmes needed to address the needs of workers with family responsibilities. Also important are the Standards on Maternity Protection (C3; 1919; C103; 1952: and C183 and R191; 2000). Maternity protection has always been at the core of the ILO's concerns about equality and the participation of women in the labour market, with the first Maternity Protection Convention adopted by member States in 1919 at the founding of the Organization.

Maternity protection is vital for ensuring that women can engage in paid employment without discrimination on the basis of their reproductive roles and without threat to the health of the mother or of the child. Maternity protection includes entitlements for leave before and after pregnancy (14 weeks in C183, 12 weeks in C3 and C103), provisions to ensure safe working conditions, non-discrimination and

employment security, cash and medical benefits and entitlements to breastfeeding breaks upon return to work.

The Convention on Workers with Family Responsibilities (C156; 1981) calls for measures in a number of areas to enable workers to meet the demands of both paid and unpaid work. First, care services and facilities are essential to enabling workers, and particularly women to engage in paid work – including childcare and elder care that is available, is affordable and is of good quality.

Workers also need leave policies that allow enough time and enough autonomy over their time to fulfil their care responsibilities. These include maternity leave under maternity protection, paternity leave to ensure that fathers can take on caring roles, parental leave which is available to either mother or father, emergency family leave and other types of leave.

Also important are working-time policies – limits on working hours for all workers, policies that make part-time available while ensuring high quality part-time work, other working time policies that allow workers more flexibility over their time for paid and unpaid work.

“The harmonization of school hours with working hours is very important for enabling workers with family responsibilities to participate in paid work.”

Active labour market policies that enable worker who have taken family related leaves to reintegrate into the labour force on their return, child benefits, other family services and benefits supporting care responsibilities, services that reduce domestic tasks, investment in infrastructure and services can all provide important supports to workers in reconciling work and family. The harmonization of school hours with working hours is very important for enabling workers with family responsibilities to participate in paid work. In most countries, school hours often end long before the working day finishes, or they include long lunch breaks that are difficult for working parents to accommodate within their paid-work schedules.

There is a continuing need to collect and disseminate information to increase awareness of the

problems facing workers with family responsibilities and their employers, and a need to promote greater understanding of the dimensions and importance of gender inequality in both paid and unpaid work.

Tripartite participation and dialogue is key for the effective design and implementation of policies to support unpaid care work and to facilitate equality of opportunity and treatment of workers with family responsibilities in paid work.

Placing work-family on the policy agenda and the costs of inaction

How do countries measure up against this policy framework? Although there are some very good examples of governments with coherent policy frameworks, in many countries there has been only limited recognition or action to address the needs of workers with family responsibilities. There are also many examples of efforts by employers and by trade unions to implement workplace measures or promote or provide care services to meet the needs of workers. However, where there is a lack of State policies or State leadership on these issues, solving, for example, workers' need for childcare or assuming the full costs of maternity protection are often too expensive for the social partners to bear alone, even after accounting for the benefits in terms of workplace productivity, absenteeism and retention. There is a clear need for stronger attention to unpaid care, and to work-family supports on the policy agenda.

Given that actions, policies and measures have not been strong, how do families cope? They cope in a number of ways. In terms of economic activity, women may withdraw or reduce their participation in economic activities, e.g. working part time or seasonally. Family responsibilities, e.g. taking care of children after school or preparing meals, steers many women towards employment in the informal economy or self-employment – where they have more control

over their paid working hours, but at the expense of legal rights, wages, social protection, representation and so on.

A lack of policies and supports for reconciling work and family also shapes families responses toward care responsibilities. Poor work-family reconciliation has contributed to the decline in fertility rates observed in many countries. Where collective and accessible solutions for childcare are lacking, workers may resort to taking children to work with them – sometimes leading to the problem of child labour and undermining child development, and child education. Parents may also leave their children alone at home. There is evidence to suggest that, while this is a very distressing situation for working parents, this is sometimes the only solution for them. They may enlist the help of older children, girls in particular, to care for younger children, another form of child labour, and a solution that undermines the opportunities of girl children for education and eventually, decent work. Engaging the help of domestic workers is a widespread response, which helps address the needs of the family for providing care in the household, but comes with great concerns globally about working conditions, wages, rights and the representation of domestic workers. Finally, the lack of policies and supports means that men and especially women everywhere are spending very long hours in paid and unpaid work combined, at the cost of their own well-being. Many of these solutions entail social costs that compromise universally shared goals of gender, race, and ethnic equality, poverty reduction and development.

The social costs of inaction in addressing the unpaid family responsibilities of workers are great; for workers, especially women, for employers, and for society. These costs can be seen in both industrialized and developing countries. International Labour Standards on these issues provide policy frameworks and solutions but, at the moment, greater efforts are needed to place these issues on the policy agenda. ■

Trade Union Views and Practices on Achieving Equality at Work

Ms. Marieke Koning

Equality Officer,

International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)

Introduction

In the past 50 years, the proportion of women in paid work has increased to 40 per cent. At least 1.2 billion of the world's 2.9 billion workers are women. This has changed societies and the labour market. Through both their visible and invisible work, women are a vital force in the global economy and in societies. However, this enormous growth in the number of women in paid work is reflected neither by a substantial increase in the participation of men in unpaid labour, nor in policies and measures that support workers' unpaid care responsibilities. These are two key factors behind the double workload of women.

The labour market does not offer equal access and opportunities to women workers and continues to contain mechanisms that discriminate against women workers:

- Women make up *60 per cent of the 550 million working poor* and face higher unemployment rates compared to men.
- Globally, women earn *12 to 60 per cent less* than men – including in occupations such as nursing and teaching. Even in the European Union, where more women than men complete higher education courses, many women still end up in undervalued and female-dominated jobs and sectors, and earn on average 15 per cent less than their male colleagues.
- In countries where legislation provides for paid maternity leave, health benefits and employment protection, not all women workers enjoy the same level of protection and a large majority is excluded from any form of social or employment protection, especially those working in the informal economy, agriculture, home work, domestic work or part-time work.

- The lack or even complete absence of public investment in infrastructure and services, including affordable childcare and other support mechanisms, forces women to limit their paid economic activities or to turn to informal paid activities that undermine the income security of their households and their own economic empowerment.

Trade unions advocating for gender equality in the workplace

The international trade union movement calls for urgent and adequate action to stop the multiple forms of discrimination against women and for recognition of the paid and unpaid roles that women play: as mothers, carers, managers of households and paid workers.

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) represents 168 million workers in 153 countries and territories. In the past, the ITUC has seen significant changes in the composition of its membership. On average, 40 per cent of the membership in its member countries are women. Large numbers of women have joined trade unions and they act as agents of change by pushing gender equality issues on to the agendas of trade unions as well as issues related to migrant workers, workers in the informal economy and domestic workers. They are also changing the culture of trade unions – their structures, policies and practices.

One of ITUC's top priorities is to achieve gender equality in trade unions and in the workplace. One of the methods chosen to achieve this is the launch of international campaigns to organize women workers, increase the number of women in elected positions and advocate for women workers' rights at the local and global levels. On 8 March 2007 ITUC

launched a campaign for full maternity rights for all women workers and called for the ratification and implementation of International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 183 and its Recommendation 191 (ILC 183/R191). On 8 March 2008 the 'Decent Work, Decent Life for Women' campaign will be launched, which aims to strengthen the rights of women workers in national labour legislation and in practice, including full maternity rights, access to childcare and equal pay.

Maternity protection

Maternity is too often perceived as an obstacle to productivity and the accumulation of profit. This is the reason why a large proportion of women workers around the world are subjected to unequal treatment in employment. Maternity is one of the areas in which gender discrimination is most blatant. Women are subjected to numerous forms of discrimination, ranging from pregnancy tests at the recruitment stage, particularly in the Export Processing Zones (EPZs), to sacking during pregnancy and loss or withholding of wages that are vital to the survival of many households. Pregnant women and their children are also exposed to many health risks.

In the EPZs, where the majority of the workers are women, discriminatory practices are common. Women who are pregnant and/or have children are often not hired. Others are fired as soon as they become pregnant. For example, Christy, who works for a company which produces trousers and coats for various North American labels, lives separately from her children because of poor living conditions near the factory and the lack of health care and childcare facilities. Overtime is the norm and the gates are often locked to prevent workers from leaving. When Carmen became pregnant she was forced to leave. She was promised that she could return to the factory after two months but never allowed back. She found it extremely difficult to find work once she had a child. Carmen works now for another company where she faces a lot of compulsory overtime to complete orders and works under extreme conditions. Because of the chemicals used at the factory, many women suffer from breast cancer.

Many factors make it difficult for such women to stand up for their rights. Employers' organizations intimidate workers, fire them and put them on

blacklists if they try to join or set up a trade union. Employers also put pressure on women workers to not tell the truth to labour inspectors when they visit their company. If they do, they face the loss of part of their salary or even their jobs. There are many similar stories to tell of women street vendors, women migrant workers, women domestic workers and women workers in the informal economy. They all want recognition by and the protection of labour laws.

The ITUC Campaign on maternity protection, mentioned above, has led to many types of trade union action around the world:

- In Morocco, trade unions took part in preparing the new Labour Code, which includes provisions to fight the informalization of work and to bring the labour laws into line with the international conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO), such as the Convention on maternity protection. They successfully argued for the strengthening of the role of the labour inspectorate because the problem in Morocco lies not in the existence of the laws but in their enforcement.
- In Brazil, the metal workers union secured two months guaranteed employment and payment of wages during maternity leave (which can last up to four months). Companies with more than 30 female employees have to provide childcare facilities. In Congo and Sierra Leone, trade unions met with government representatives to discuss the ratification and implementation of ILC 183. In Nepal, trade unions called for government policies on equal pay and ratification of ILC 183. The government has made 8 March a public holiday for women workers. In Peru and Columbia, trade unions formed coalitions of women trade unionists and NGOs and mobilized women throughout the country to campaign for changes to national legislation on maternity protection. In Italy, trade unions called for the proper integration of ILC 183/R191 and, during their campaign negotiated with the government over the adoption of labour legislation on maternity protection, especially atypical workers. In the Netherlands, trade unions succeeded in persuading the government to extend labour legislation and social protection for women on maternity leave to women working in small-scale enterprises. In Montenegro, trade unions organized a roundtable discussion on ILC 183 with government representatives, em-

employers' organizations, trade unions and women municipal coordinators.

- Finally, in Croatia trade unions published a report on violations of the rights of women workers in relation to maternity protection, which occur most often in the textile, catering and maritime sectors. Together with NGOs, they called for the urgent ratification of ILC 183. The minister responsible responded positively and announced the development, together with other relevant bodies, of a draft proposal for the ratification of ILC 183. The trade unions are preparing amendments that should bring the national labour legislation into line with ILC 183 and are developing a standard on maternity protection for collective bargaining.

Decent Work, Decent Life for Women

The fundamental challenge for trade unions is not only to meet the individual needs of mothers but also for the recognition of the human, trade union and working rights of women in labour laws and in practice. This will add greater value and visibility to the considerable contribution that women make to societies, at the local and global levels, through their paid and unpaid work. Working together to implement the Decent Work agenda is key to this process.

In addition, the *United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against*

Women (CEDAW) has been signed by most of the states in the world. This international statement of women's rights incorporates several ILO Conventions on discrimination and equal pay.

The *Beijing Global Platform for Action* agrees that governments and other bodies should "mainstream a gender perspective". The declaration includes Section F on Women and the Economy, which calls for labour legislation and practices to ensure, among other things, "opportunities for women and men to take job-protected parental leave and have parental benefits" and to promote "the equal sharing of responsibilities for the family by men and women, including through appropriate legislation, incentives and/or encouragement, and also promote the facilitation of breast-feeding for working mothers".

CEDAW and the Beijing Platform of Action are important existing instruments for strengthening labour laws and practices that aim to achieve gender equality at work. The application of labour legislation should be monitored on an annual basis to ensure that it works in practice. Trade unions have the expertise and the knowledge of the day-to-day realities of the work and life of women, and are therefore crucial and valuable partners for those reviewing, revising and monitoring labour legislation.

For more information go to the ITUC Decent Work, Decent Life for Women Campaign: www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?rubrique198 or contact: equality@ituc-csi.org. ■

The Importance of International Labour Standards to Promoting Gender Equality

Ms. Raquel Gonzalez

Assistant Director of the Geneva Office of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)

Too many women in developing and developed countries still face difficulties with reconciling their work commitments with their family responsibilities. As a consequence, many find themselves discriminated against in the world of work, earning low wages and working under precarious conditions that perpetuate or exacerbate poverty and do not meet the definition of decent work.

Trade unions and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) are tackling the problem through campaigns and concrete action at the national level. However, in order to address the problem in all its dimensions, action is urgently required by member states, which have the primary responsibility for promoting policies aimed at reconciling family life and working life as an essential element of achieving gender equality. The International Labour Organization (ILO) can help member states develop such policies.

The adoption of international labour standards forms part of the ILO's constitutional mandate. Several of these standards address women's rights and gender equality. If such standards were to be widely ratified and effectively implemented, significant progress could be achieved with reconciling family responsibilities and work. Some of these standards are discussed below.

The Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (No. 156) was adopted in 1981 and to date has been ratified by 39 countries. Its aim is to create effective equality of opportunity and treatment for men and women with family responsibilities. It calls on states to make it an aim of national policy to enable persons with family responsibility to engage in employment without being discriminated against and avoiding conflict between employment and family responsibilities. In so doing, community services,

childcare and family facilities should be identified. The Convention also gives employers and workers' organizations the right to participate in designing the measures that give effect to the provisions of the Convention. This is an important provision because it allows engagement in a tripartite dialogue at the national level in order to reconcile family and work in the workplace and in society as a whole.

The Maternity Protection Convention (No. 183) was adopted in 2000. At present, only 13 countries have ratified it. Trade unions believe that more member states should ratify this important Convention. This led the ITUC on 8 March 2007 to launch a campaign for the ratification of this Convention and for implementation of its accompanying recommendation (No. 191). The Convention provides for maternity leave of not less than 14 weeks and for breastfeeding breaks. According to the Convention, cash benefits should be provided to women who take maternity leave. The level of these cash benefits should ensure that a woman can maintain the health of herself and her child and a suitable standard of living. Member states are also requested to ensure that maternity does not constitute a source of discrimination in employment and access to employment. Providing maternity protection according to the provisions of Convention 183 would allow millions of women, particularly in the developing world, to combine work and family responsibilities without being discriminated against in the labour market and without putting their health or that of their child at risk.

Other ILO conventions that are relevant to the reconciliation of family and work include the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111). Convention 100 aims to

promote equal remuneration for men and women for work of equal value. Convention III aims to promote equality of opportunity and treatment in respect of employment and occupation. In contrast to the instruments mentioned above, these have a fairly high level of ratification but greater efforts are required to ensure their enforcement. In November 2007 the ILO Governing Body adopted a four-year action plan to eliminate discrimination, which trade unions hope will ensure better implementation of these Conventions.

A discussion on the importance of standards to reconciling work and family responsibilities cannot omit the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, 1948 (No. 87) and the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98). Convention 87 provides for the right, freely exercised, of workers and employers, without distinction, to organize and to further and defend their interests. Convention 98 aims to protect workers who are exercising their right to organize. The instrument also protects workers' and employers' organizations against acts of interference by each other and promotes voluntary collective bargaining. These two instruments provide trade unions with the tools to organize to defend the interests of their members and bargain collectively for improvements in working conditions, including on issues related to gender equality and reconciliation of work and family responsibilities. The implementation of these two Conventions is a prerequisite for effective social dialogue.

Finally, any discussion of reconciling family and work must address the situation of domestic workers. These workers allow others, mainly women, to work while their families are taken care of. At the November 2007 Session of the ILO Governing Body, the Workers' Group – supported by a number of governments – made a strong case for the need to adopt a new standard (possibly in the form of a Convention supplemented by a Recommendation) on promoting decent work for domestic workers at the International Labour Conference in 2010. Domestic workers are often not protected by national labour legislation and are therefore subject to all kinds of abuse. Most of these workers are women, often very young, and many are migrant workers who suffer from blatant discrimination, racism, sexual harassment and violence. Trade unions believe that these workers should benefit from decent working and living conditions. The final decision on the standard will be taken by the Governing Body in March 2008 and trade unions hope to obtain the support of enough governments to win the case for this important instrument.

Reconciling work and family responsibilities requires the collaboration of member states, employers' and workers' organisations. Member states have a crucial role to play in creating a regulatory environment that facilitates the adoption of policies and measures that allow workers to reconcile their family responsibilities with their work. Social dialogue and collective bargaining should be considered essential tools for identifying and putting in place such policies and measures. ■

Reconciling Family and Work

Mr. Carlos Recondo

Member of the Chamber of Deputies, Chile

There are different facts and figures that explain the issue before us – the new labour scene in which professionalization and the emergence of new technologies have enhanced women’s participation in the labour market. This presentation outlines these, and draws on experiences from Chile.

The fact that 38.4 per cent of women are employed as compared to 71 per cent of men indicates that women have had to join the work force because, for example, they need to increase the household income or because more households are headed by women. The percentage of households headed by women rose from 19.9 per cent in 1990 to 37.2 per cent in 2006; the percentage of non-needy women heads of household rose from 20.3 per cent in 1990 to 28.8 per cent in 2006.

A study carried out by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) of the salary differences between men and women shows that on average women earn 30 per cent less than men for similar responsibilities. This means that many women have to work longer hours to meet the family’s basic needs and are therefore away from the home for longer periods, with the family problems this poses.

Our country has had to adopt concrete measures to deal with this problem. One consequence of this has been that most companies have opted to introduce changes that provide economic support for women workers but that do not have a direct impact on the family nucleus. Examples are stipends, loans and productivity vouchers. Other companies have modified their working hours, reducing the standard working day, introducing flexible working hours or even allowing work to be done from home.

The agency in charge of implementing measures to promote employment equality is the National

Women’s Service (SERNAM). The Chamber of Deputies, for its part, established the Committee on the Family, which has drawn up various draft laws that have served to move the country forward in this area, for example by:

- extending the hours for feeding children under the age of two;
- creating various forms of parental leave, such as paternity leave and sick leave for the parents of children less than one year old or of children under the age of 18 who are seriously ill.

In terms of wages, one bill making its way through Congress seeks equal pay for equal work, while another promotes flexible maternity leave. Other legislative initiatives that will be sent to parliament deal with the compatibility between work obligations and family life.

Another measure worth mentioning is the Women Heads of Household Programme, which seeks to provide jobs for approximately 30,000 women, essentially poor and middle-class women, by improving their access to the labour market. The project is implemented in communities with more than 20,000 inhabitants in which 25 per cent of households are headed by women.

Another gender equality measure, introduced by the current President, is the “Programme for Good Employment Practices, including Gender Equity” (Iguala.cl). The studies compiled show that companies that used such practices had annual returns of 18.3 per cent over five years, whereas those with poor practices obtained returns of 7.9 per cent during the same period. Other instruments exist, such as the Code of Good Employment Practices, which is applied throughout the central State administration and Iguala.cl.

The Code is intended to fight gender inequality by reviewing and improving the practices and functioning of public services. The Iguala.cl programme endeavours to introduce cultural changes with a view to reducing inequality, both in paid work and unpaid work, which basically is what is carried out in the household, by implementing non-discriminatory human resource management models.

In practice, easily duplicated reference models have been developed for recruitment and staff selection processes, career development and access to training, gender balance in managerial positions, protection of maternity rights and parental responsibilities, reconciliation of work and family responsibilities, and prevention and punishment of workplace and/or sexual harassment.

The model has been introduced in more than 40 Chilean companies, and a system of certification is being implemented for employment gender equity. The latter basically consists in giving a kind of gender equity seal of approval to companies that are willing to work towards equal treatment for men and women in their own right. The aim is to have a positive impact on homes and in terms of productivity and corporate image.

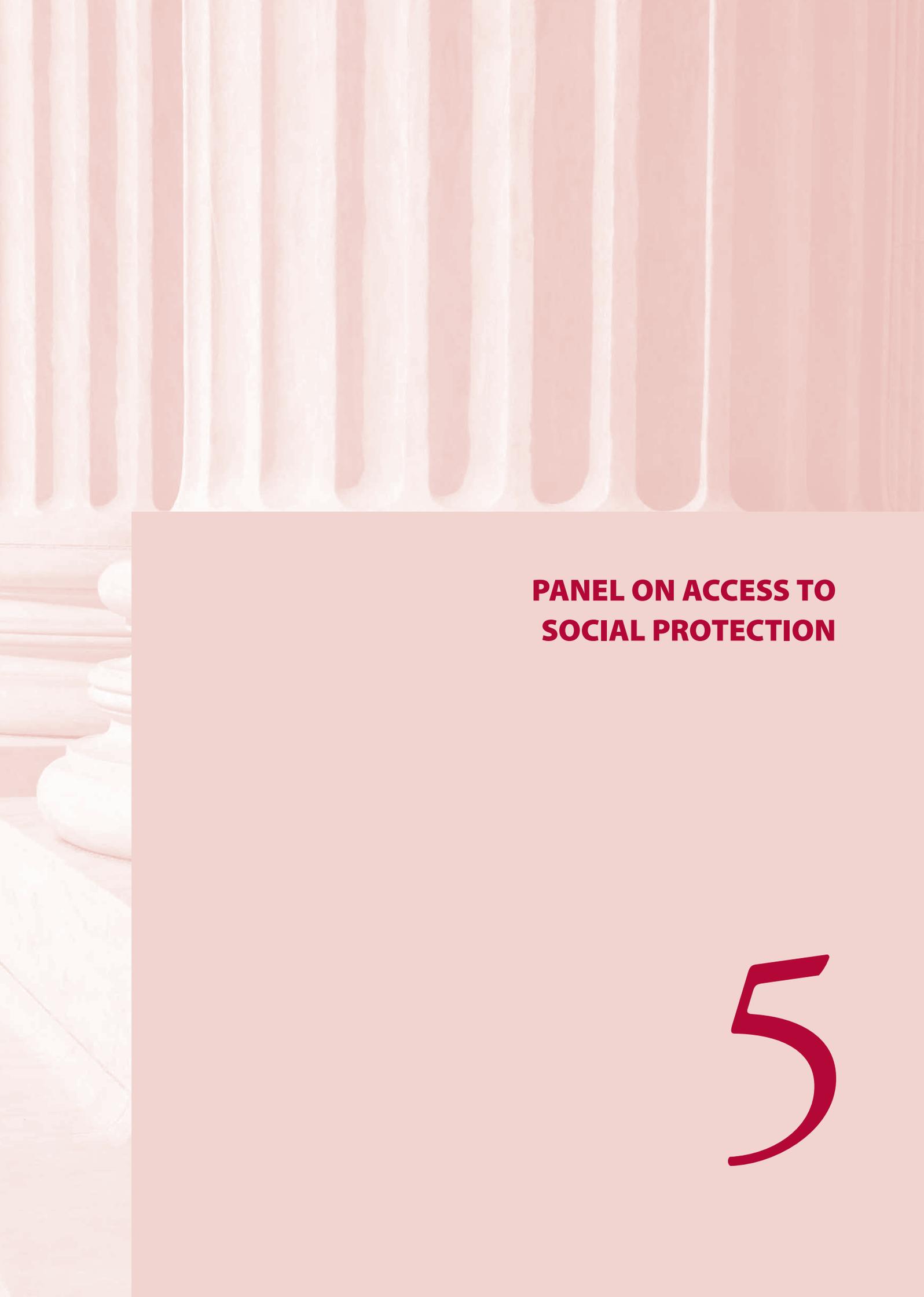
To obtain the seal, companies have to meet criteria in seven areas defined in the Guide to Good Employment Practices on Sexual Non-Discrimina-

tion. Companies accepting the criteria would be complying with the international standards met by countries such as Germany, Mexico and the United Kingdom.

Consideration is being given to the possibility of applying the certification to small and medium-sized enterprises as well. The Government is endeavouring not only to introduce mechanisms for equality in human resource management in Chilean companies, but also to provide the means of penetrating more demanding and competitive international markets.

The Ministry of Labour has developed direct, indirect and labour intermediation programmes for women, which implies creating employment opportunities for 15,000 women from the poorest to the lower middle classes.

Lastly, it is important to touch on an aspect of women's involvement in politics. A draft law is being studied that would make it easier for women to participate in politics, where the question of reconciling work and family is very relevant: the long, busy days do not make it easy to balance work and home. Much is being done in Chile to narrow the employment gender gap, generated either by lack of opportunities or by the difficulties they encounter in reconciling their professional or working lives with the obligations inherent in raising children and running a home. ■



**PANEL ON ACCESS TO
SOCIAL PROTECTION**

5

Overview and Debate

The session focused on sharing experiences and discussing strategies aimed at increasing women's access to social protection. Much of the discussion focused on maternity protection, health care and the implications of ageing for women. The panelists for this session were Ms. Razavi, Research Coordinator, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD); Ms. Engström, Member of the Labour Committee, Parliament of Sweden; Ms. Beales, Policy Manager, Helpage International; and Ms. Jhabvala, President of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), India.

Ms. Razavi provided a general outline of the historical processes that have enabled women to participate in the labour force worldwide. She also gave a brief overview of the trends regarding women's access to social protection. Ms. Beales advocated a rights-based approach to development that takes account of the needs of the most vulnerable groups in society, especially elderly women. Ms. Engström discussed some of the lessons learned from the Swedish experience and Ms. Jhabvala focused on the lack of protection available to women workers in the informal economy, as illustrated by the example of India.

Over the past 20 years, there has been a surge in the level of women's labour force participation. Although this has been a global trend, the **Nordic countries**, with Sweden as a prime example, stand out. In order to understand how this progress was achieved, it is first important to recognize that it did not take place in a political vacuum. Ms. Razavi outlined that movements were guided by a shared vision of achieving gender equality in the employment sector, and that much of their success is attributable to how they were "underpinned by political alliances among women's rights activists across political parties and within government commission, as well as by strategic alliances with men in labour unions." It

was through such a collaborative process that women in Sweden were able to negotiate for equal pay, family benefits, maternity leave and the provision of care services funded largely by the public sector.

The background of the Swedish movement contrasts starkly with the situation in many developing countries. While women in the Nordic States entered the workforce gradually through an integrative process concerned with the protection of women, in **developing countries** they have often entered the labour market during times of crisis or political upheaval. Poverty and instability have thus been driving factors pushing women into the workforce without much thought given to considerations of equality or social protection. Although there seems to have been an increase in the number of women participating in the workforce, ILO data suggests that most of these women are employed in the informal sector. Segmentation of the labour market has therefore persisted despite signs of progress. This segmentation has had detrimental effects on women as employment in the informal sector remains largely unregulated and workers are rarely afforded the social rights and protections they would otherwise enjoy. As such, on the financial side, the pay gap continues to exist. This has been exacerbated by the restructuring of the social sector post-1980, which emphasized fiscal restraint and the liberalization of the private sector. Worsening economic situations have resulted in cuts in funding for public services such as health care. It has been women in the lower economic classes who have been disproportionately disadvantaged because they can no longer afford to finance their health expenses.

Ms. Razavi emphasized that responses to these developments must focus on how to give poor women **access to social rights**. Several organizations, including UNRISD, have identified the importance of public health infrastructure, and accordingly, there

has been new emphasis on strengthening public health systems in developing countries, ensuring that workers receive appropriate remuneration for their services and improving pension schemes. The 1990s was the decade of **pension reform**, particularly in Eastern Europe and Latin America. Some of the schemes that emerged, most notably the Chilean model, were privatized and based largely on calculations of the contributions made during an employee's career. This discriminated against women who often found it difficult to make the minimum number of monthly contributions required to qualify for the schemes and thus remained largely unprotected in their retirement years. Individualized pension schemes often leave little resources available for redistribution. Public schemes have therefore been introduced by several states as an alternative to the privatized models. Interestingly, in recent years there has been growing support for the notion of minimum pensions as a universal right, although no consensus on the matter has been reached.

“Government policies cannot deny the elderly their rights to economic and physical security.”

Ms. Beales outlined that more attention should be given to **protecting the elderly**, especially women, after they retire and when they are in need of most care. Government policies cannot deny the elderly their rights to economic and physical security. Ms. Beales suggested that developments in this regard should be based on a rights-based approach to economic and social security, which recognizes the inherent rights of individuals regardless of age or economic standing. It is only through such an approach that the standards set out in international agreements, such as CEDAW or the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), can be translated into policy. Moreover, policymakers should embrace the concept of a **universal social minimum** as both a possible and an affordable method for the protection of women of all ages.

In recent years, research has provided evidence that the benefits of economic growth are not trickling down to where they are needed most. The elderly are increasingly reliant on their relatives for both financial and medical support. This has serious repercussions given the ‘ageing boom’ now being experi-

enced in which the fastest growing age group is the over 65s. The situation is particularly serious for older women, who often feel neglected and of lesser worth once their children become independent or they are forced to retire from the workforce. An agenda that provides decent work and social protection for everyone, irrespective of their sex and age, is crucial. Parliamentarians should give more thought to policies on universal cash benefits, which might help to reduce stigma and household competition.

Ms. Engström underscored the need for men and women to work together to implement strong and equitable policies. All policies aimed at providing social care should be drafted with **burden sharing** in mind. A positive attitude by employers to the responsibilities of parenting is essential for both men and women in the labour market. In response to this challenge, Sweden has implemented legislation that prohibits discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy or maternity. Ms. Engström recommended that parliamentarians push for the implementation of legislation that provides for other such positive obligations.

Ms. Engström referred to the Swedish **system of parental benefits**, which helps to provide both long- and short-term security for workers. Temporary benefits also exist which allow parents to fulfil their responsibilities as care givers in the event that a child or other family member falls ill. A system of pregnancy benefits also exist which varies the amount of responsibility given to pregnant women, depending on their abilities during the various stages of the pregnancy. Ms. Engström said these assurances were built into the Swedish system to enable women to have a career while simultaneously increasing their economic independence in a secure and equitable environment. Despite the progress made in Sweden, there are still a number of challenges that prevent the achievement of equality in the workforce. More must be done, for example, to challenge the traditional stereotyping of women, which considers them more suited for household work than paid employment in the formal sector.

Ms. Jhabvala demonstrated that much more needs to be done in developing countries to provide women with **social security**, especially those employed in the informal sector. Social security policies need to be multidimensional in order to target the demands of childcare, maternity and health, shelter and old age. Trade unions, such as SEWA, have a major role

to play in organizing women workers and helping them to achieve full protection, especially in terms of income and social security. In doing so, trade unions should aim to make women individually and collectively self-sufficient, economically independent and capable of making their own decisions.

Although trade unions have a large role to play, social security is a cross-cutting issue which requires commitment by actors in all sectors. The provision of childcare facilities is an example of an issue which would require trade union mobilization as well as input and support from the government. SEWA thus adopts an approach which regards socio-economic security as “an integrated concept, in which elements need to develop simultaneously rather than consecutively. The processes of organizing, leadership, capacity building and education need to go together with income, health care and housing.”

“Demographic change coupled with poverty and health epidemics, such as HIV/AIDS, have created various challenges for developing countries to overcome.”

Demographic change coupled with poverty and health epidemics, such as HIV/AIDS, have created various challenges for developing countries to overcome. The high rate of maternal mortality caused by poverty- and health-related issues has led to what Ms. Jhabvala termed a “**missing generation**” of care workers. In order to meet the demand for an increased number of care workers, India’s labour market has become noticeably more informalized, with a higher proportion of women employed casually without any social benefits or guarantees. In cases such as these, there are strong arguments for implementing universal policies, such as cash transfers, to help alleviate the burden on women. There is a need for innovative policies aimed at shifting some of the responsibilities for childcare, in particular, on to the father.

Plenary Debate

There was a general consensus among the participants that **hidden discrimination** is a major factor preventing women and the elderly from accessing

adequate social protection. In most countries, women and the elderly are still largely marginalized and their views should be brought into the mainstream in order for their concerns to be appropriately addressed and resolved. As such, there is a need for trade unions and civil society to become more active in assessing the needs and desires of the communities they are meant to protect, and coordinate more effectively with the different branches of government. It was again emphasized that social security is a cross-cutting issue, and that success in this area is contingent on equal representation and integrative policies. Some participants noted that distinctions are often made between economic, social and labour policies, but that these distinctions are usually abstract and invalid as all aspects are connected and must be assessed together.

International organizations have a key role to play in creating guidelines to help states formulate suitable policies. However, it must be recognized that there is no one policy that is suitable for every country because each situation varies tremendously depending on the demographic, economic, political and cultural context. States have reacted to these problems in a variety of ways.

In some states, Sweden for example, **social security** is made available through a system of progressive taxation. This approach may be suitable for social democracies in which the working and more affluent socio-economic classes are, in general, willing and able to cope with the tax burden. However, for those states that do not aspire to social democratic principles, or at least not to the same extent, the tax burden is a major barrier to the provision of social security, health care or adequate pension schemes. In these cases, policies have a tendency to be more privatized which usually means that the less affluent, and the most vulnerable, are left unprotected. Societies in developing countries have, for instance, coped with such situations by relying increasingly on extended families. In many countries, such as India, this practice is largely reflected in cultural traditions and must be taken into account when considering options for reform.

A number of areas were identified where reform is most pressing. First, more must be done in all countries to address the situation of women working in the **informal sector**. Because workers in the informal sector are usually self-employed or casual workers, the linkages between employers and employees are largely invisible. Governments should step

in and seek to define this relationship in order to clarify the contributions that each should be making to the provision of social security.

Several participants also stressed the need for more equitable **retirement policies**. Pension schemes in particular should be reformed, and more consideration given to the effect they will have on women. Reforms to Chile's pension schemes are currently in the pipeline. Other participants noted that in order

for women to protect themselves, more should be done to give them access to legal and financial assistance. A strong correlation was found between high levels of education and the success of women in the workforce. A human rights-infused approach to education is crucial for younger generations and the elderly in that it allows for the prevention of harmful practices and increases the opportunities for informed long-term planning. ■

Women and Access to Social Protection

Ms. Shahra Razavi

Research Coordinator, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)

This presentation provides an overview of the issue of access to social protection, highlighting some of the more urgent and timely policy topics for discussion.

Women have always been present in the economy but this has been, in many countries and for many periods of time, and remains especially in many rural contexts to this day, in sectors of the economy that are unpaid – doing subsistence-level work in agriculture for example or what is now called in the literature “care work”, the work of caring for individuals. This may be seen as a contribution to creating “human capital”, as economists like to call it, but it is invisible, undervalued and not well supported by many policies around the world.

If women have always been present in the economy, what we have seen over the past two decades is the increasing visibility of women in the world of *paid* work – that is the difference. It is not that they were invisible in the world and in the economy before, but what is new is that they are increasing present in the world of paid work.

In a different era, when one entered the labour market and became a worker this came with certain social rights: the right to a pension and the right to some kind of health insurance, a form of citizenship if you like. This is how in many countries around the world, particularly in many Western European countries and in many so-called developed countries, a lot of male workers gained social rights. This was the welfare state, which pretty much, at least in its earliest stages, addressed the needs of male workers and their “dependents”. A lot of social rights came with doing paid work. In many developing countries, women’s increasing presence in the world of paid work does not seem to have come with the kind of rights that we associate with citizenship. This has a lot to do with the nature of labour markets in

many developing countries, and also in some parts of developed countries’ labour markets where paid work is becoming “informal” and does not come with any social rights.

This does not have to be the case. Historically, it has not been so in some of the Nordic welfare States. In Sweden, for example, in the 1960s women began to enter the labour force in large numbers and their entry was accompanied increasingly by a number of social rights. This did not happen in a political vacuum. The presence of women and the rights that they gradually gained were underpinned by political alliances among women’s rights activists across political parties, and strategic alliances with men in the labour unions as well as in government commissions and, of course, in the ruling Social Democratic Party, which was guided by a vision of gender equality and which focused on work. They negotiated solidarity wages, family benefits, leave entitlements and care services that were financed and often delivered by the public sector, which was itself one of the main employers of women. So this was in many ways very positive.

Across a number of indicators in Western European, the Nordic countries really do stand out, be it poverty in households headed by women, women’s economic empowerment, the extent to which, for example, household incomes are brought in by women or the percentage of household income that is earned by women. The Nordic countries stand out and do very well compared to other countries such as the so-called liberal welfare States of the United Kingdom, the United States or Canada.

Since the 1980s there has been a massive entry of women into the world of paid work, the main increases being in South America and Central America in addition of course to the developed countries, but this

has been very much under conditions of crisis and a decline in the level of wages earned by men, and in a context of economic crisis in many cases. So this was not so much a positive entry as much as poverty acting as a push factor that pushed a lot of women into the labour market. This happened largely within the informal economy. Even though gender wage gaps in some countries appear to have narrowed they still remain significant and, most importantly, the way these women have been incorporated into the labour market in the informal economy has meant inclusion without the social rights and the entitlements to welfare that have been associated historically with being a citizen-worker.

Why have the social sector reforms not been able to provide a lot of women workers with entitlements? In the 1980s and 1990s there was a crisis in the health-care sectors of a number of developing regions, which came along with the introduction of fees and user charges for people to access public health facilities, and increasing reliance on out-of-pocket payments, which are very regressive in nature. In addition to being class-biased against those who do not have the cash required to access services, this was also extremely gender-biased. Data showed that women were suffering disproportionately from the imposition of user fees for care provision in countries such as Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Tanzania, to name just a few. There was also evidence of falling hospital admission rates for pregnant women and increases in maternity-related deaths in countries with fairly good health infrastructure, such as Tanzania.

There have been two responses: the promotion of mutual health insurance schemes and the promotion of social insurance schemes. Mutual health insurance schemes are voluntary schemes. Some have a number of problems in that they are not obligatory and, in many cases, are not financially sustainable. Others, such as the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India are financially sustainable and do seem to be addressing the needs of a significant number of women, including those working in the informal economy. Social insurance schemes again raise the problem that in many countries, 90 per cent of women work in the informal economy – India being a case in point. Social insurance schemes tend to cover those who are working in the formal economy, so once again there is a problem in terms of coverage of women workers (as well as male workers of course).

These are serious questions: a recent report by Social Watch is very explicit about the fact that there is no way of ignoring this question. To give access to a lot of poor people, and a lot of women who are working informally and cannot afford to pay user charges, the most obvious solution is to strengthen public health systems. Even if you have good insurance schemes, people have to rely on the existing health infrastructure, and if that health infrastructure is not well-funded or well-staffed, even for the money the insurance scheme is paying, the kind of health care that they will get is bound to be of low quality. The most obvious policy response has to be to strengthen the public health system, and paying those who are working in that system, a lot of whom are women, better wages.

“In a context where an ageing population is a fact, not just in the developed countries but also increasingly in many developing country contexts as well, pension provision is an important issue.”

In a context where an ageing population is a fact, not just in the developed countries but also increasingly in many developing country contexts as well, pension provision is an important issue. In the 1990s the international financial institutions pushed one particular model despite all kinds of opposition from different quarters – the privatized so-called Chilean model. This system was imposed on many indebted countries in Latin America and in Central and Eastern Europe, but it was resisted in some countries where there was a democratic system in place, and where political parties and trade unions were powerful enough to negotiate and provide alternative solutions. Brazil and Costa Rica are examples of countries where the imposed model was not taken on board in its entirety, but in other countries it was imposed and there are serious concerns about what this kind of system will imply for the security of people in their old age.

In particular, there are serious gender issues that need to be considered. In this kind of privatized system what you receive as a benefit is calculated in terms of your so-called contributions, that is, how many years you have been paying into the system; the level of financial contribution you make, which

is higher if you have been earning higher wages; and whether you have had an uninterrupted career because you did not stop paid work to care for a child or for a sick parent or husband. If your contributions are higher, then your benefit at pension age is higher. A typical woman who has all kinds of unpaid care responsibilities and goes in and out of the labour force is penalized.

This close connection between contributions and benefits discriminates against those on lower incomes. In addition, because life expectancy in this kind of privatized system is taken into account when benefits are calculated, and because women tend to live longer, this also tends to discriminate against women. Finally, the fixed commission charge that is often added on to cover the administrative costs of the pension system also discriminates against those on lower wages and therefore penalizes women more. The larger point is that in privatized and individualized systems, there is very little space for redistribution. It is women, other low-income earners and irregular workers who are often the ones with the most to lose from such an arrangement.

There are alternative models: the sort of social pensions that countries such as South Africa use are

good examples to be thinking about. A system that is financed out of taxation, and that is not contribution-based in the way that the privatized systems are can be used, and has been used in several countries, to reach men and women on lower incomes, and those working in the informal economy much more effectively than one based on individualized accounts and one of the privatized systems can. There is a lot of interesting evidence. The South African government has recently said that its social pension scheme is probably one of the most effective programmes they have for eradicating poverty. There are many questions as there are many different models for providing social pensions: whether those below a certain income should receive the social pension or whether it should be a universal benefit? At what age should people receive it?

We know that social policy benefits that are targeted only to the poor often become very poor benefits because the middle classes do not have a stake in them. This may lead to some reluctance on their part to be taxed to provide funds and thus to support such systems. There is likely to be more political support for universal systems which everyone can claim and use. ■

Enhancing Women's Security at Work: Social Protection and Access to the Labour Market in Sweden

Ms. Desirée Pethrus Engström

Member of the Labour Committee,
Parliament of Sweden

This case study addresses Sweden's work towards equality and especially equality within the labour market. Sweden has been working to increase women's participation in the labour force for a long time. But why is that goal important and how can we ensure equality within the labour market?

The Swedish parliament has agreed on a number of *equality goals*. These encompass economic equality, which means that all women and men should have the same access to education and paid labour and provides lifelong economic independence, and equal distribution of the unpaid housework and caring, which means that women and men should take equal responsibility for housework and providing care and also receive equal access to care services and support.

Sweden has gone a long way towards increasing equality but the responsibility for caring for the home and for the children still largely falls on women. This is why the Swedish parliament has declared that the two abovementioned goals should always be mainstreamed in all politics of the country. This is a political goal that largely coincides with the European Union's objectives on equality in connection with the Lisbon strategy, and the Lisbon strategy's aim to increase the competitiveness of the European Union. More women are needed within the work force in Europe because of challenges related to demographics.

Employers' attitudes to parenting are crucial for women and men in the labour market. Sweden has adopted legislation that requires employees actively to take measures to improve equality. Employers should work proactively to make it easier for all employees with children to combine their working life with parenting. Discrimination against pregnant women is prohibited by law. The Office of the equal opportunities ombudsman oversees compliance with the Equal Opportunity Act.

Women's share in the labour market

The politics of equal opportunities have largely prevailed in Sweden to the extent that Swedish women are combining work with raising children. On average, Swedish women have 1.8 children, which is a relatively high number compared to other countries. Fluctuation in the business cycle affects the national birth rate. It tends to increase during times of economic prosperity and decrease during periods of recession. This could be connected to the level of security in the labour market during different economic cycles. The labour force participation rate for employees between the ages of 20 and 64 years is 80 per cent for women and 86 per cent for men. Women in Sweden stay in the labour market for a longer period of time than women in any other European country. Sixty-nine per cent of women aged 55–64 years are still part of the country's workforce.

Only 14 per cent of women aged 40 and above are childless but women are having their first child later in life. Women tend to wait until they have a stronger position in the labour market and the average age at the birth of the first child is 28 in Sweden.

Parental benefit, temporary parental benefit and pregnancy benefit

An important part of security for women in the labour market is the well established Swedish parental benefit, which was introduced in 1974. Parents are entitled to a shared parental benefit for 13 months (or 450 days). The benefit can be taken up at different times and at a variable level and must be used before the child is eight years old. Both parents have the right to be off work full time during the child's first 18 months and it is then possible to shorten the work-

ing day to six working hours until the child's eighth birthday.

Parental benefit is related to wage levels, entitling the parents to 80 per cent of their most recent wage. There is, however, an upper limit of approximately 3 700 Euros per month in terms of the amount paid by the state, although several collective agreements supplement this figure.

“Statistical studies show that families with a relatively equal use of parental benefits have a better chance of staying together and this, of course, is a huge benefit for the whole family.”

Of the 450 days, 60 are reserved for the parent who takes the least parental leave, usually the father. These days cannot be transferred to the other parent and often go under the name of *fathers' days*. Women currently claim 80 per cent of the mutual parental benefit days, which does not suggest equality. The Swedish government has introduced an equality bonus to stimulate equal use of the parental benefit. This equality bonus entitles families that use maternal and paternal days more equally to extra benefits. There was a lively debate about whether to introduce a quota system that linked more days directly to the father but the government decided on an equality bonus instead. Studies show that a father's use of parental benefit is strongly linked to economic incentives. The result of the equality bonus must be monitored and evaluated to assess the outcome of this reform. Statistical studies show that families with a relatively equal use of parental benefits have a better chance of staying together and this, of course, is a huge benefit for the whole family.

Even men in senior managerial positions are starting to take more time off work using parental benefit. Swedish parliamentarians take parental leave to spend time with their children and even ministers have taken time off using the parental benefits. These all act as important role models.

Another security system concerning women in the labour market is the *temporary parental benefit* that is given when a child is ill. This benefit enables the parent to stay home from work without incurring

high monetary losses. Every child is entitled to 120 days of temporary parental benefit, although a medical certificate is required after one week of illness.

Pregnant women can receive *pregnancy benefit*. This is paid to women who are unable to perform their usual work tasks in the later stages of their pregnancy because of the nature of their work. In the early stages of pregnancy, an employer is responsible for providing the pregnant woman with new tasks if pregnancy makes it impossible for her to perform her usual duties.

Sweden has a social security system that enables women to have children. Benefits and social insurance payments are designed to enable women to pursue a career and to secure and increase their economic independence.

Access to childcare

An important step in maintaining a large proportion of women in the labour force is access to childcare. All local authorities are obliged to offer childcare to all children over the age of one within three months of parents applying for a place. The cost is low, which makes accessibility high. Approximately 84 per cent of children between the ages of one and six are enlisted in the local authority childcare, compared to 12 per cent in 1974.

Future challenges

In spite of such progress, there is still a lot to be done. Women still use the majority of parental days and women are highly overrepresented in part-time jobs. Many women choose to work fewer hours in order to take care of their children and the household, while men seldom make this choice. Research shows that women take responsibility for a majority of the unpaid work, and that many women's stress levels increase when they arrive home while men's stress levels decrease. Naturally, these inequalities affect women's wages. Women's wages increase more slowly than those of men and there are few women in senior managerial positions in Sweden.

There is, however, an apparent trend for many young men to consider it totally natural to stay at home with the children, at least for the two non-transferable months. This also gives men better and

closer contact with their children. Hopefully, more men will see the advantages of combining work life with family life and this will kill off the old stereotypical gender roles that have affected our society for

far too long. It is to be hoped that both women and men will be able to combine a successful career with a happy family life. Increased equality is an asset to both the family and the social economy. ■

Implications of Ageing for Social Protection and Women

Ms. Sylvia Beales

Head of Strategic Alliances,
HelpAge International

This presentation discusses the question of access to social protection with a specific focus on older people and in particular, older women.

HelpAge International (HAI) is an organization which is both a global network of agencies in the North and South and a development agency, with network affiliates and partners bound together by a common mission. This is to promote and protect the rights of older women and men to economic and physical security, health and social security and care-giving across the generations. The work of HAI seeks to present the voice, views and opinions of older people and promote this in policy making. Voice and participation are core principles and methods of HAI's policy and programme engagement.

Rights and development

HAI believes that development policy and practice can and should be based on human rights principles and human rights obligations; and that human rights agreements can and should be translated into national, regional and international strategies, practical programmes and policy instruments. Policy making to further social protection both promotes human rights compliance and also delivers direct and quantifiable development benefits to very poor people.

There is very compelling evidence in the world to show that policy-making, which takes forward the concept of a universal social minimum to reach the poorest groups in societies, is both possible and affordable. The ILO is indeed championing such an approach with the support of its global social security programme, focussing on social security by right to older people through social pensions, children through child grants, disabled people through disability allowances, and the promotion of access of all to health

through measures such as universal health insurance and also unemployment benefit. The ILO should be saluted for its efforts in this important initiative.

The right to social security is embedded in many instruments. Of particular importance is the fact that it is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of human rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, as well as in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is reflected in global and regional agreements on ageing, such as the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, and various regional plans of action from the African Union, including its Policy Framework and Plan of action on Ageing. Recent policy dialogues, including those held in Africa in 2006, which resulted in for example the 2006 Livingstone Call for Action on social protection call for costed plans for social transfers to be in national development plans within three years. In 2008 the African Union will lead a process of encouraging all African Union member States to follow up that important initiative. This process is more urgent than ever.

Increase of ultra poor

The reality of the situation is that large numbers of people are far below the dollar-a-day pay baseline. Evidence on the numbers of the ultra poor show that 162 million are living on below 50 cents a day, with over 75 per cent of this number in Sub Saharan Africa. The numbers of the poor in Asia, the site of the economic miracle, are both on the increase and show that large numbers of people are not only getting poorer but working in the informal economy – where they do not benefit in terms of economic and physical security from economic growth. Evidence is showing that specific measures to reach the poor-

est are urgently overdue. Economic growth does not 'trickle' down to the poorest.

It is important to examine the crisis facing older people and children because older people and those that depend on them are often overrepresented in the numbers of chronically poor; i.e. those who cannot get out of the poverty they are in and bequeath this poverty and crisis down the generations. Both older persons and children are disproportionately represented in poverty data. Figures show that the poverty of older people is far higher than that of other population groups in a number of countries, including Bolivia, Moldova, Uganda and Viet Nam.

Poverty will not be dealt with in the absence of specific measures to reach the poorest people. A significant World Bank study conducted in 2005 across Africa showed that the poorest households are those which have older people and children in them. Studies, such as these, show that a strategy on poverty requires identifying the households and the ages of those that compose them (in this case children and older people) so as to have an impact on their poverty. We should not be surprised that the evidence points to high poverty levels in such households. Migration in search of work and the HIV/AIDS crisis has resulted in large numbers of children left in the care of relatives as well as orphans and children living with HIV/AIDS – many of whom are cared for by older people. In Southern Africa close to 60 per cent of children affected by HIV are cared for by older people. While child-headed households are a real problem, they do not account for more than 1 per cent of total households.

Therefore, in order to reach children, and to target HIV/AIDS impacts, support must be afforded to the older carers both women and men. Acting on the evidence has important implications for the development agenda, including action to achieve the Millennium Development goals, which do not yet require age disaggregated data of poverty and other data, despite the burden of poverty and hunger falling so disproportionately on older people.

Demographics and poverty

The world is ageing fast and the fastest growth is occurring in the developing world and, most importantly, in the least developed countries. In particular, Asia particularly is facing an ageing boom, which is

a triumph of development, but also a poisoned chalice for the growing numbers of the ultra poor. Action on poverty in Asia requires targeting the older poor there. Overall there is an exponential rise of the over-60s in all regions, including Africa, and the growth of the over-60s is faster proportionately than younger age groups.

Life expectancy figures are interesting because it is the LDCs again that show a huge increase in longevity. If a person reaches 60 years in a least developed country today, he/she will probably live for 15 more years. The current situation is that less than 20 per cent of the world's population has access to social security. Even worse, in some countries social security only reaches five per cent of the population. We may ask ourselves how older people manage with no social security, no support for health care and no support for their children or dependants. These are important and pressing policy issues that need to be examined.

Social security and older women

Women live longer in all regions of the world. Long life for the older woman, can however become a terrible burden. In 2001, a Bangladeshi woman summarized the status of women in her country as follows: "We are poor, we are women, no one wants us, we are alone." Although economic progress has been made in Bangladesh, older women still face discrimination, lack of access to basic services, economic insecurity and hardship. We must focus on the essence of her statement: that being female and being old means being unsupported by the family, state or anyone else.

In relation to work, most older women and men work in the informal sector and have "poor quality" jobs. The informal economy – which accounts for the majority of the employment growth amongst the poor – has very significant numbers of the older poor as well. For example 92 per cent of women workers in agriculture are in the informal economy where incomes are low and unpredictable.

For example older women coffee pickers in Uganda earn 0.25cents an hour. Overall the numbers of older workers are extremely high: 86 per cent of older women work in Malawi, 76 per cent in Mozambique, 57 per cent in Uganda, 38 per cent in unpaid work in families in Bolivia, 70 per cent in Madagascar. These figures might seem quite surprising. Gener-

ally the visibility of the older female worker is low; the work is often unrecorded, being in the domestic, agricultural and informal sector. Older women are also disadvantaged in the job market due to ill health and illiteracy. Despite this, the majority of the over-60s work often into very old age.

Most older workers do not receive social security. It is very important when promoting decent work programmes to take into account an inclusive approach to the social security dimension, which is one of its four pillars. Most Decent Work programmes are not inclusive of the informal worker, in particular of the older worker in the informal sector. In least developed countries, large numbers of older people are working. Older women in particular are not included in decent work programmes.

Innovative approaches and the role of cash transfers

In recent years there has been some recognition of innovative work focusing on supporting grandmothers. Older citizen action to access benefits and services is increasing and is receiving some support. Nevertheless older people, and older women especially, require much more support and recognition from development agencies or governments.

For older women and men regular cash transfers are important because they can transform lives from that of chronic insecurity and unpredictability for themselves and that of their dependents. They also confer recognised citizenship. For relatively small amounts of money a range of social and economic

benefits accrue; including (importantly) well-being and enhanced dignity, but also developmental benefits. Evidence from countries such as Bolivia, Lesotho, South Africa and Brazil show that regular cash transfers lead to more cohesive families and communities, increased job seeking, especially amongst females, job creation, local and community based economic growth and regeneration, improved health and education access and better nutrition. Cycles of inter-generational poverty can be broken.

The ILO's Decent Work Agenda is a critical initiative because it links employment to social protection for all people, not just workers in the formal sector. The ILO's work on affordability is very important also. It has been estimated that a pension in some countries of Africa would cost between 1 and 2 per cent of GDP and would bring poverty rates down by 40 per cent. This is also the case in Latin America. It is not therefore a question of affordability but more one of political will to put in place the systems that would have such dramatic results.

There is overwhelming evidence to show that action to extend social protection via regular cash transfers would be a most effective and developmental response to the global increase in chronic poverty levels and the associated problems of social inequality and insecurity. The Decent Work Agenda and the Women and Work group should prioritise action to support access of the poor to social protection as should governments, development partners and the civil society sector. Priority should further the human rights of all and take decisive action on putting the poorest people at the centre of development efforts. ■

Women and Work: Key Trends and Challenges

Ms. Renana Jhabvala

National Coordinator,
Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)

The Role of SEWA

The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is the largest trade union in India working in the informal economy. It was recognized as a central trade union organization in 2007. SEWA was formed about 30 years ago. When it was formed it had about 200 members. In 2007 there were 1.1 million members all over India. The members of SEWA are women in the informal economy: street vendors such as vegetable vendors, clothes vendors, and so on; home-based workers, women who work in their own homes making garments or leather products; women who sell their labour and services such as agricultural workers, childcare providers and construction workers, and who make up the greatest number of the membership; and small-scale producers, such as small farmers and milk producers.

SEWA works for women and social protection in the informal economy. There is a lot of talk about the informal economy. In India, 92 per cent of the workforce is in the informal economy; they are informal workers, but they are not marginal because they contribute 62 per cent of India's Gross Domestic Product, 50 per cent of its savings and 39 per cent of total exports. Almost all (nearly 97 per cent) of women workers in India are in the informal sector. Their social protection needs are the same all over: childcare, maternity rights and health care, shelter and assistance in old age. In India, social security schemes are mostly for workers in the formal sector. There is a provident fund but this, too, is only for formal workers. However, because of the level of need – and the many advocacy efforts – the government of India has recently introduced a Bill in parliament to provide social security for informal workers.

SEWA's objective is to organize women workers to achieve full employment. Full employment represents income security and social security, which

are of course closely linked. The objective is also to make women individually and collectively self-reliant, what we call empowerment – economically independent and capable of making their own decisions.

SEWA is actually a family of organizations. The trade union is the basic organization which, like a banyan tree, kept growing and putting out new organizations till it became a movement. Economic security is looked after by a number of organizations. The SEWA Bank was formed in 1975 and was perhaps the first microfinance institution. It had 300,000 depositors, all SEWA members, and a working capital of 900 million rupees in 2007. SEWA has also been promoting cooperatives and associations such as milk cooperatives, handloom workers' cooperatives, farmers' cooperatives, embroidery cooperatives, and so on. Even more importantly in this globalizing world, it aims to reach the markets and to have the markets reach the producers. SEWA promotes marketing companies. While before we mostly promoted cooperatives, we now try to promote companies that are owned and managed by the members of SEWA – by poor self-employed women.

The issues facing SEWA members

The five issues in social security are insurance, health, housing, pensions and childcare. SEWA has tried to persuade mainstream insurance companies to reach out to poor women. In the beginning, the insurance companies said that they could not do this because their lives were too risky to be insured. SEWA therefore started its own insurance business and we now have links with many of the major insurance companies. A SEWA member can take out integrated insurance against debt, widowhood, hospitalization and asset loss. She also has the option of insuring her children and her husband.

Childcare is perhaps one of the most important areas. It has declined in importance in policy terms, which means that a lot of the childcare benefits that had previously been won are now being lost. SEWA runs its own childcare programmes that link very closely with the government programmes. We also ask employers to pay for childcare. Currently, more than 8,000 children are involved in the childcare programme. We have found that the benefits for children enrolled in the childcare programme are tremendous because their level of nutrition improves and their educational attainment in later years is increased. The benefit for the mothers is that their earning capacity increases.

Housing is something that is often not considered to be social security. For a woman, however, her house is her security, even though when she comes home her tension levels go up. One interesting thing is that over 50 per cent of women in India (and the same thing is found in the South-East Asia region) work from home, so they look after their family or do their housework at the same time as they produce for the market. The SEWA Bank has been giving housing loans so to enable women to have a house in her own name, but we also started our own construction institute which has been building houses in the name of women. Perhaps water and sanitation are equally important for women, because it is the woman who fetches the water, and sanitation means having a toilet. Not having a toilet is very difficult for women.

SEWA has formed its own health cooperative, consisting of midwives, nurses and doctors. SEWA links very closely with the government's health system, for both preventive health and curative health. It is important to promote the role of midwives because, except in certain states, deliveries take place at home using midwives who are not integrated into the health system. Generic drugs must also be promoted because the cost of medicine has risen sharply. Only by using generic drugs can poor people afford health care.

There is a pension for destitute people in India but few people can claim it – only those below the poverty line or who have a “poverty line card”. The

SEWA Bank launched its own pension scheme with a mutual fund provider. The pension plan aims to give SEWA members a degree of security in their old age. Even 20 years ago, workers in the informal sector would not think about their old age – the present was too important to them. Today they are ready to save and plan for their old age. The scheme started in 2007 and about 40,000 women joined it in the first year.

Future challenges

This is what one organization is able to do, but it is only a drop in the ocean. SEWA believes that there has to be a universalization of social security. SEWA has been actively advocating for a social security law for informal workers, which has recently been introduced. However, workers cannot be totally dependent on the Government – they should contribute something, and employers and industry should not be let off the hook but should also contribute. India is very spread out, villages are also very dispersed, which means that these kinds of programmes should be implemented through a variety of organizations, including workers' organizations.

There are a number of challenges: first, social security should be owned and managed by workers, and organizations should work with government to deliver social security. Second, in all systems it is very important to maintain quality services because, for poor people, the quality of service they receive is often the difference between life and death, and they are ready to pay for a high quality service. However, in order to promote social security, there is an urgent need to build capacity among poor people and the workers. The final need is for a good policy environment; an environment where small efforts, large efforts and workers' organizations are recognized and encouraged. Private corporations and big private industry are very much encouraged but cooperatives and small, people's organizations are not encouraged so much. Finally, successful efforts should be scaled up in order to provide universal social security. ■



**PANEL ON REDUCING RISKS
AND VULNERABILITIES**

6

Overview and Debate

The panel discussed mechanisms for addressing discrimination, exploitation, abuse and violence at work. The panellists for this session were Ms. Patten, Member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); Ms. Masudi, Senator, President of the Socio-Cultural Committee, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC); and Ms. Semidei, Parliamentary Gender Expert, Paraguay. Ms. Patten's presentation focused on how the CEDAW Convention can be used to address discrimination against women in the workplace. Ms. Masudi and Ms. Semidei discussed discrimination and violence against women from the perspective of the DRC and Paraguay, respectively.

Discrimination on the grounds of sex is unequivocally prohibited under conventional and customary international law. The **principle of non-discrimination** is fundamental and has been enshrined in every human rights convention since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It also forms the basis of CEDAW, which establishes international standards for eliminating discrimination against women. States Parties to CEDAW are obliged to eliminate discrimination in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres, to prevent discriminatory practice in both the public and the private sectors and to provide effective remedies for those who have suffered from abuses. Under Article 11 of CEDAW, States Parties are legally bound to a negative duty, in that they must refrain from carrying out acts of discrimination, and to a positive duty to ensure that the rights of women are protected, even through the adoption of temporary special measures.

Ms. Patten stated that, in theory, CEDAW goes much further than other examples of legislative frameworks in that it provides for both *de facto* and *de jure* equality. Moreover, the definition of discrimination adopted by CEDAW is a broad one that encompasses both direct and indirect forms of discrimination on

the grounds of not just sex, but, among other things, age, class, race, marital status and family circumstances. The main enforcement mechanism of CEDAW, other than its Optional Protocol, is the state reporting procedure, which obliges States Parties to submit periodic reports on the legislative, judicial, administrative or other measures which they have adopted to give effect to the provisions of the Convention. Ms. Patten said the involvement of non-governmental organizations is crucial in this regard as it enables the collection of country-specific information.

Despite the massive steps made by CEDAW, there are still major inequalities in employment. A clear focus of the Convention is on targeting the most persistent of these inequalities which prevent women from having equal access to the labour market and result in major differences between men and women in terms of working hours, pay and pensions. Among the reasons for the persistence of discrimination, CEDAW highlighted the existence of a **glass ceiling**, which prevents women from reaching levels suited to their abilities. Moreover, discrimination is based largely on stereotypes and misguided perceptions. The Committee regrets that not enough sex-disaggregated data has been collected on the situation of women in the informal sector.

The international covenants for human rights set out the guidelines for equality but, as Ms. Masudi pointed out with reference to the DRC, women are still subjected to several forms of violence that stem from **traditional practices and beliefs**, and which have become ingrained in the hierarchy of the government, the police and the army. The victimization and sexual harassment of women in the DRC has reached such egregious levels that no opportunities exist for women to develop transferable skills to help them to enter the workforce. Under domestic legislation, sexual violence is covered by the penal code but "moral offences" are not yet recognized. Ms. Masudi

said that government initiatives are attempting to combat discrimination and violence by pushing for wider criminalization. The lack of transparency in the DRC means that the biggest challenge is not passing legislation, but overseeing its effective implementation. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 will benefit women greatly, once the principle of equality is integrated into the DRC's Constitution.

According to Ms. Semidei, from a Paraguayan perspective, the achievement of gender equality is a crucial component of **sustainable development**. The biggest challenge facing women in Paraguay is the high rate of maternal mortality, which is indicative of the abject levels of poverty and exclusion prevalent in the country. Sixty-five per cent of employed women work in the informal sector, and an overwhelming majority of them are unpaid. Migration is a serious issue in Paraguay and has been exacerbated by increasing levels of poverty and the lack of employment opportunities.

“More must be done to give women access to basic services, particularly health care, as well as equal access to the labour market.”

To help improve the situation for women in Paraguay, it is not enough to introduce new legislation. The government must take responsibility for its actions and ensure that laws are effectively enforced. More must be done to give women **access to basic services**, particularly health care, as well as equal access to the labour market. New economic policies must be designed to combat poverty and regularize the informal sector. In order to truly overcome inequalities, however, Paraguay needs a political system based on social justice and respect for human rights. Discussion and dialogue should be fostered as they represent crucial methods for identifying priority areas and possible solutions.

Plenary Debate

In the plenary discussion it was agreed that laws in and of themselves are insufficient for preventing discrimination or fighting violence against women. All legislation must be accompanied by policies that ensure their **implementation**. Several participants

suggested mainstreaming gender concerns into the budgetary process in order to increase social spending in such a way as to improve the conditions of both men and women.

The need for a **cooperative approach** to address the multifarious nature of discrimination was again underscored. All branches of government should work together and in cooperation with civil society to address the roots of discrimination and to ensure that the experiences of men and women are equally represented. This would be particularly helpful in Latin American countries, such as Mexico, where traditional macho values remain largely untransformed by national policies. This would also assist countries, such as the DRC, which are experiencing or just emerging from conflict. In the absence of democracy, Ms. Masudi said it was crucial for parliamentarians to remember who they are meant to represent. Ms. Masudi called for national legislation to be brought into line with commitments made in international treaties, in particular those pertaining to violence against women.

On this note, Ms. Patten said that the **CEDAW Optional Protocol** is an invaluable instrument in the fight against gender-based discrimination and violence, and suggested that parliamentarians encourage their governments to ratify the Protocol. She reminded parliamentarians of the crucial role they play in the state reporting procedure established under CEDAW. Parliamentarians should not only ensure that reports are submitted within the established deadlines, but also participate in the preparation of reports and oversee the implementation of their concluding comments. Since CEDAW is about ensuring substantive rather than mere legal equality, parliamentarians should push for a withdrawal of the reservations issued by their governments at the time of ratification.

Participants highlighted the rapid rate at which **technology** is advancing and the way these developments are affecting industry. Women have traditionally been marginalized in the fields of science and technology, and more should be done to train women in these areas to enable them to keep up with developments. The role of **education** in general was emphasized. Education offers the best way of equipping younger generations with the knowledge and skills necessary for them to contend with future challenges. It was also suggested that children should be taught about human rights standards from an early age. ■

Using the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to Address Discrimination against Women in Employment

Ms. Pramila Patten

Member of the UN CEDAW Committee

Introduction

The labour market is an important arena for efforts to promote gender equality and generally improve the position of women. Women's economic empowerment through employment is critical to achieving gender equality.

One of the basic rights that women have is to not be discriminated against in the workforce and in the workplace. This right is enshrined in international law. United Nations Conventions starting with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) – collectively referred to as the international bill of rights – share a general prohibition of distinctions based on sex, among other grounds, with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and ILO Conventions such as Convention No. 111 on Discrimination in respect of Employment and Occupation.

CEDAW establishes international standards for eliminating discrimination against women. States Parties to CEDAW are under a legally binding obligation to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres, to prevent discriminatory practices in both the public and the private sectors and to provide effective remedies for those who have suffered from abuses.

Article 11 of CEDAW specifically addresses women in employment. Under Article 11(1) of CEDAW, States Parties have a legally binding obligation to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment in order to ensure, on a basis of equality between men and women, the same rights, in particular:

- a) The right to work as an inalienable right of all human beings;
- b) The right to the same employment opportunities, including the application of the same criteria for selection in matters of employment;
- c) The right to free choice of profession and employment; the right to promotion, job security and all benefits and conditions of service; and the right to receive vocational training and retraining, including apprenticeships, advanced vocational training and recurrent training;
- d) The right to equal remuneration, including benefits, and to equal treatment in respect of work of equal value, as well as equality of treatment in the evaluation of the quality of work;
- e) The right to social security, particularly in cases of retirement, unemployment, sickness, invalidity and old age and other incapacity to work, as well as the right to paid leave;
- f) The right to protection of health and to safety in working conditions, including the safeguarding of the function of reproduction.

Article 11(2) provides that in order to prevent discrimination against women on the grounds of marriage or maternity and to ensure their effective right to work, States Parties shall take appropriate measures:

- a) To prohibit, subject to the imposition of sanctions, dismissal on the grounds of pregnancy or of maternity leave and discrimination in dismissals on the basis of marital status;
- b) To introduce maternity leave with pay or with comparable social benefits without loss of former employment, seniority or social allowances;
- c) To encourage the provision of the necessary supporting social services to enable parents to combine family obligations with work responsibilities and

participation in public life, in particular through promoting the establishment and development of a network of childcare services;

- d) To provide special protection to women during pregnancy in types of work proved to be harmful to them.

Unfortunately, the real situation of women in the labour market is in sharp contrast to the fine words of CEDAW and other international standards. Women across the world continue to be discriminated against.

Women have unequal access to the labour market. In most countries, the labour force participation rate is lower and the unemployment rate higher for women than they are for men. Even in those countries where there has been an increase in the proportion of economically active women, there are still major differences in terms of working hours, pay, sectors and pensions.

Far more women than men work in part-time jobs and many women are overqualified for the work they do. Women are paid less than men for the same work or work of equal value, and their educational achievements are often no safeguard. Although there has been an increase in the number of women with higher educational qualifications, most women make traditional career choices and, as a result, the labour market remains gender-segregated.

Women are mainly discriminated against because of stereotyping and misguided preconceptions of women's roles and abilities. These stereotypes often lead to women being offered employment that is precarious and badly paid, lacks any possibility of career advancement, is not gratifying and does not allow the full development of their abilities. Finally, all too often family responsibilities, such as housework, childcare and looking after elderly relatives, are not shared equally between women and men, leading to additional barriers to women entering and remaining in the workforce and pursuing a career.

The reporting obligation under CEDAW

Although the fine words of Article 11 of CEDAW stand in sharp contrast to the daily reality of millions of women in the labour market, CEDAW and its Optional Protocol remain vital tools in the elimination of discrimination against women in the field of employment.

Article 18 of CEDAW creates a reporting obligation for States Parties to the Convention (185 as of

December 2007), under which Parties undertake to submit, for consideration by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, a report on the legislative, judicial, administrative or other measures which they have adopted to give effect to the provisions of the Convention. Reports must be submitted within one year of ratification and thereafter every four years.

The Committee examines States Parties' reports and engages in a constructive dialogue with representatives of the State Party, after which it issues concluding comments in which it highlights the principal areas of concern and makes recommendations to States Parties.

Article 28 of the Convention permits ratification or accession subject to reservations. Such reservations may be withdrawn and the Committee – when examining States Parties' reports, during the constructive dialogue with States Parties and in its concluding comments – urges the withdrawal of such reservations. Although CEDAW is a treaty with a large number of reservations, not many States Parties have entered reservations to Article 11 (See Ireland, the United Kingdom, Malta, Micronesia and Singapore).

The scope of CEDAW

CEDAW, which was adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, is the most comprehensive legal instrument that addresses women's rights and is often referred to as the international bill of rights for women. The provisions of CEDAW encompass all dimensions of women's lives and draw on principles of equality, non-discrimination and state obligation.

CEDAW covers both direct and indirect discrimination, be it intentional or unintentional. Article 1 defines discrimination against women as: "any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field."

Article 2 obliges States Parties to condemn discrimination against women in all its forms and to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women. Article 2 sets out the measures that States Parties should take and these include, among others, to:

- Embody the principle of equality of men and women in their national constitutions or other appropriate legislation (the Committee strongly recommends to States Parties that they adopt the definition of discrimination in Article 1);
- Adopt appropriate legislative and other measures including sanctions prohibiting all discrimination against women;
- Establish legal protection against discrimination through national tribunals and other public institutions;
- Refrain from engaging in any act or practice of discrimination against women and to ensure that public authorities and institutions also act accordingly;
- Take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organization or enterprise;
- Take all appropriate measures including legislation to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women.

Article 3 requires States Parties to take all appropriate measures in all fields to ensure the full development and advancement of women. Article 4 provides that the adoption of temporary special measures to accelerate de facto equality between men and women, such as affirmative action measures and quotas, will not be considered discriminatory.

The overall object and purpose of the Convention is to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, not just discrimination based on sex, with a view to achieving women's *de jure* and de facto equality with men in the enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Convention goes beyond the concept of discrimination used in many national and international legal standards and norms. While such standards and norms prohibit discrimination on the grounds of sex and protect both men and women from treatment based on arbitrary, unfair and/or unjustifiable distinctions, the Convention focuses on discrimination against women, emphasizing that women have suffered and continue to suffer from various forms of discrimination because they are women.

The Convention is a dynamic instrument and since its adoption, the Committee has taken a highly progressive approach to its interpretation.

The Committee considers temporary special measures (also commonly called affirmative action mea-

asures or positive discrimination) to be a necessary strategy for achieving equality of results in the fields of employment, education and politics, among others, and that such measures do not discriminate against men. In General Recommendation No. 25 of Article 4(1), in order to clarify the nature and meaning of temporary special measures and to facilitate and ensure their full utilization by States Parties, the Committee stresses that the obligation of the State Party extends beyond a purely formal obligation of equal treatment of women with men, and that a purely formal legal or programmatic approach is not sufficient to achieve women's de facto equality with men. The Convention requires that women be given an equal start and that they be empowered by an enabling environment to achieve equality of results. It is not enough to guarantee women treatment that is identical to that of men. Under certain circumstances, non identical treatment of men and women will be required in order to address such differences. Pursuit of the goal of substantive equality also calls for an effective strategy aimed at overcoming under-representation of women and a redistribution of resources and power between men and women. Equality of results is the logical corollary of de facto or substantive equality.

First, it is the obligation of States Parties to ensure that there is no direct or indirect discrimination against women in their laws and that women are protected against discrimination committed by public authorities, the judiciary, organizations, enterprises or private individuals in the public or in the private spheres. Second, it is the obligation of States Parties to improve the de facto position of women through concrete and effective policies and programmes. Third, it is the obligation of States Parties to address the prevailing gender relations and the persistence of gender-based stereotypes that affect women not only through individual acts by individuals but also in the law and legal and societal structures and institutions.

CEDAW concluding comments

In its concluding comments after examining the implementation of States Parties' obligations under Article 11, the Committee regularly expresses its concerns about the continuing high level of unemployment among women and the higher rate of unemployment among women compared to that among men. In spite

of the constitutional guarantees of gender equality in most countries, or other national legislation prohibiting discrimination against women, the Committee notes with concern that women remain disadvantaged in the labour market.

The Committee expressed extreme concern about the situation of young women in Greece with university diplomas, who constitute the majority of the unemployed (combined fourth and fifth periodic report, June 2002). Similarly, the Committee noted the apparent contradiction between the high level of educational attainment by women in Iceland and the lack of equality in the labour market there (combined third and fourth periodic reports, January 2002). The Committee also expressed concern about the high level of women's unemployment in Turkey, where they have a very low participation rate in the labour force, particularly in urban areas, and are concentrated in agriculture as unpaid family workers or in unregistered work with low or no income and a lack of social security benefits (combined fourth and fifth periodic report, January 2005).

Women are severely under-represented in the labour market in general and in senior and decision-making positions in particular. The Committee regularly notes the low representation of women in senior management positions and on boards of public as well as private companies. The Committee also addresses strong occupational segregation, both horizontal and vertical, and the fact that women remain concentrated in low-paid jobs in the labour market.

Other concerns of the Committee include:

- The persistence of discrimination in hiring;
- The concentration of women in part time and temporary jobs, mainly in low-skilled employment which offers fewer opportunities for professional advancement;
- The persistent wage gap between women and men notwithstanding women's high levels of educational achievement, differences which are indicative of the persistence of indirect discrimination against women in the labour market;
- The difficulties mainly faced by women in reconciling their personal and family lives with professional and public responsibilities;
- The increasing number of women in the informal sector; and
- The prevalence of sexual harassment at work.

Direct and indirect discrimination in employment

Because CEDAW covers both direct and indirect discrimination, the Committee has often addressed indirect discrimination in the labour market. Gender discrimination in employment is often expressed in less visible ways. Laws, regulations, policies and practices which appear neutral on the face of it can have a discriminatory impact.

The Committee expressed concern about direct and indirect discrimination against women in the labour market, where women earn significantly less than men in both the public and private sectors (combined fourth and fifth periodic report, Turkey, January 2005).

In the case of Germany, the Committee noted the persistence of the wage gap between women and men, notwithstanding women's high educational achievements, as well as the discrepancy between their qualifications and occupational status. It found such differences to be indicative of the persistence of indirect discrimination against women in the labour market (fifth periodic report, Germany, January 2004). The Committee has often recommended that State Parties ensure that the definition of discrimination contained in Article 1 of the Convention, in particular the Convention's prohibition of indirect discrimination, be fully integrated into their legislation – especially its labour legislation.

CEDAW and the persistence of gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes lie at the heart of many of our perceptions of the workplace and the people that operate within it. Descriptive stereotypes can indirectly contribute to indirect discrimination: the negative expectations of women's abilities and skills may lead members of an organization to socially ostracize them, thereby keeping women from becoming central players in their organizations. Women's input may often be deemed less valuable; they are more likely than men to be omitted from key discussions and overlooked when perspectives are being sought about important decisions, creating a system whereby women are cut off from opportunities to exert influence.

Employers justify their preferences for male employees with stereotypical assumptions about women's physical and intellectual capacities and their family responsibilities. As a result, women are increasingly pushed into low wage service sector or public sector jobs or seek employment, including secondary employment, in the unregulated informal sector.

The significant number of women in the informal sector or in part-time work is very much linked to the patriarchal culture and norms which relegate women to secondary status in the family and society. Patriarchal values perpetuated at the level of the household – for example, where women may have lower levels of education, skills and training because of intra-household decisions – are reflected in labour market relations. Similarly, patriarchal perceptions or gender roles are also reflected in the economic occupations of women. Part-time, temporary forms of employment are mostly “female” occupations. The lack of childcare also ties women to the home. Domestic chores and care-giving activities performed by women are unpaid and undervalued. As a result, women remain in an unfavourable position in the labour market since patriarchal ideologies influence perceptions of women workers.

Article 11 of the Convention on discrimination in the field of employment must be read in conjunction with Articles 2 and 5 of CEDAW. Article 2(f) obliges States Parties to take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women. Article 5(a) obliges States Parties to take all appropriate measures to address the societal norms underlying many discriminatory practices, by “modify[ing] the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women with a view to achieving the elimination of . . . practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women”.

The Committee has often addressed stereotypes. When examining the third periodic report by Luxembourg, it viewed with concern the stereotypical attitudes that tend to portray men as heads of households and breadwinners and women primarily as mothers and homemakers (third periodic report, Luxembourg, January 2000). Similarly, it recommended that the Netherlands take steps to eliminate stereotypes relating to traditional areas of employment and education for women (second and third periodic report, Netherlands, July 2001).

Multiple discrimination

The Convention addresses all forms of discrimination against women. In General Recommendation No. 25, the Committee sets out that certain groups of women, in addition to suffering from discrimination directed against them as women, may also suffer from multiple forms of discrimination based on race, ethnicity or religious identity, disability, age, class, caste or other factors. Such discrimination may affect these groups of women primarily, or to a different degree or in different ways to men. The Committee stressed that States Parties may need to take specific temporary measures to eliminate such multiple forms of discrimination against women and its compounded impact on them.

On numerous occasions in its concluding comments, the Committee has addressed the double or compounded discrimination faced by vulnerable groups of women such as disabled or elderly women or women belonging to minorities.

Discrimination in hiring

During its constructive dialogue with States Parties, the Committee often highlights how their responses to the particular problem of gender discrimination in job hiring is unsystematic, revealing the absence of a clear policy and a coordinated response to ensuring equality of opportunity at all stages of the employment process.

The Committee has regularly expressed its concerns about discrimination against women during the hiring process, which is still widespread, and the fact that many governments fail to take appropriate measures to prevent employers from engaging in such practices or to provide women with redress for violations of their rights. Such discrimination limits women's access to jobs, including many highly paid and prestigious jobs. Employers in both the public and private sectors often continue to specify gender when advertising vacancies and to use information acquired during interviews regarding family circumstances to deny women employment.

Another widespread practice among employers that prevents women from enjoying equal opportunity in the job market is discrimination based on marital status and family circumstances. These practices, which are more prevalent in the private sector, are often a result of poor oversight and weak regulation

of private enterprises by the government authorities responsible for ensuring equal opportunity in employment. Private sector employers routinely fail to provide benefits, in particular maternity and family benefits, which disproportionately affects women.

Employers' practices of discriminating in hiring and failing to provide employee benefits, combined with the State's unwillingness to redress these violations, leaves women acutely vulnerable in private companies.

The Committee strongly recommends the adoption of temporary special measures, which it considers to be one of the means to realize de facto or substantive equality for women. In its concluding comments on the situation of women in the labour market, a key recommendation is the adoption of temporary special measures. This is because the Committee is of the view that the position of women will not be improved if the underlying causes of discrimination against women, and of their inequality, are not effectively addressed. The lives of women and men must be considered in context, and measures adopted for a genuine transformation of opportunities, institutions and systems so that they are no longer grounded in historically determined male paradigms of power and life patterns. In General Recommendation No. 25, the Committee specifically recommends the application of temporary special measures in the field of employment. They consider the adoption of temporary special measures to be a necessary strategy to overcome the under-representation of women in certain fields such as education, employment and politics, as well as a necessary strategy to redistribute resources and power to overcome past or present discrimination.

Pay gaps

The persistence of pay gaps is a matter of concern in many countries. Current explanations provided for wage gaps include women's lower educational attainment and intermittent career paths, women working less during their lifetime (calculating periods of maternity leave and part-time work) and women having less of a career. In fact, other factors also contribute to inequalities in pay, such as occupational segregation, biased pay structures and job classification systems, and decentralized or weak collective bargaining.

The Committee regularly expresses its concerns about pay gaps and has made several concrete recom-

mendations. In the case of Switzerland, it was concerned that in spite of constitutional provisions on the right to equal pay for work of equal value and an Equality Act, women remain disadvantaged in the labour market. The Committee was particularly concerned at the pay differentials between women and men and some of the criteria used to justify them, particularly as regards considerations of a social nature such as family responsibilities. The Committee recommended that job evaluation systems based on gender-sensitive criteria be developed with the aim of closing the existing wage gap between women and men (combined initial and second periodic reports, Switzerland, January, 2003).

In the case of Austria, the Committee expressed its concern about women remaining segregated in low-paid jobs in the labour market and recommended that action be taken in order to decrease the wage discrepancies between female-dominated jobs and male-dominated jobs, especially in the private sector (combined third and fourth periodic reports and fifth periodic report, Austria, June 2000).

In the case of Denmark – while noting and welcoming the creation of an equal pay network for companies interested in exchanging experience on the reasons for the gender-based division of labour, pay differentials and methods of guaranteeing equal pay, and that women's participation in the labour market is an impressive 75 per cent and their unemployment rate is low at 5.6 per cent – the Committee expressed concern about the persistence of the wage gap between women and men. The Committee recommended that the State Party develop policies and adopt proactive measures to accelerate the eradication of pay discrimination against women, including job evaluations, collection of data, further study of the underlying causes for the wage gap and provision of increased assistance to social partners in collective wage bargaining, in particular in determining wage structures in sectors dominated by women in order to address gender segregation in the labour market (fourth and fifth periodic reports, Denmark, June 2002).

The “glass ceiling”

Although globally, women are continuing to increase their share of managerial positions, the rate of progress remains slow and uneven as women are faced with attitudinal prejudices in the workplace. In spite

of the slow but steady increase in the share of professional women in the workplace, the nature of women's career paths continues to block them from making progress in the organizational hierarchies in which they work. Often on recruitment, qualified women are placed in jobs that have a lower value in terms of skill requirements and remuneration and find themselves in what are considered to be "non-strategic" jobs rather than in management jobs leading to higher positions.

The Committee has also expressed concern about the serious disadvantages women face in the labour market, including the under-representation of women in senior positions, and it recommended that the State Party take measures to ensure equal opportunities for women and men in the labour market through, among other things, the adoption of temporary special measures (combined fourth and fifth periodic report, Italy, January 2005).

There are some excellent examples of countries that have effectively tackled this problem through the adoption of quotas or affirmative action programmes to fight against the inherent prejudice against women in senior posts. Norway is one such example. Section 21 of its Gender Equality Act provides that each sex comprise at least 40 per cent of members appointed or elected by the public authorities to Councils, Committees, Government Boards, Boards.

Another commendable initiative which the Committee noted was in relation to Germany, which, in its efforts to increase women's de facto equal opportunities in the labour market, entered into an agreement to promote equal opportunities for women and men in private industry (Fifth periodic report, Germany, January 2004).

Part-time work

Part time and temporary employment is more common among women than men. Part-time employment is particularly prevalent in sectors dominated by women. Regardless of whether part-time employment is voluntary or involuntary, it affects salary and development and career opportunities, as well as levels of compensation in the social insurance system, for example, sick pay and parental leave insurance, unemployment insurance and pensions.

Due to various stereotypes, part-time employment has mostly been linked with women, and only

occasionally in relation to policies connected to women's reconciliation of family life and employment. Part-time work entails many disadvantages for the women concerned, in terms of lower remuneration and benefits, and pension rights which are only moderate when women choose to work part time.

The Committee has often expressed its concern that women continue to be over-represented in part time and temporary jobs (combined initial, second and third periodic report, Malta, July 2004; combined third and fourth periodic report, Belgium, June 2002; combined third and fourth periodic report and fifth periodic report, France, July 2003; and **fifth periodic report**, Spain, July 2004). It recommended these States Parties to intensify their efforts to increase women's employment, and to ensure that women have access to full-time and permanent jobs if they wish. Other recommendations include the need to:

- Address the consequences of part-time work for women, especially in regard to their pension and retirement benefits;
- Extend full social security benefits to part-time workers, the majority of whom are women; and
- Give women more access to full-time employment.

There are some best practices in the area of part-time work such as in Norway, where, as a means of reducing under-employment, part-time workers have a statutory right to increase their working hours before employers appoint new staff. In Sweden, too, some commendable measures have been taken to address the overrepresentation of women in part-time work. Those who involuntarily work part time and want to work full time are registered as part-time unemployed. In 2002, a law was enacted to prohibit discrimination against part-time employees and employees whose employment is limited in duration. Under this law, it is prohibited for an employer to treat a part-time employee or an employee with a fixed term contract less favourably.

Women in the informal sector

As early as in the mid-1990s, the Committee started regularly to address the question of women in the informal sector, to express its concern about their precarious situation and to demand statistical data

from States Parties. It regularly expresses its concern about the overrepresentation of women in the informal sector, where work remains unorganized, insecure and poorly paid and offers little or no social protection and no social security benefits.

Today's global world is one of widening income inequality and for many, especially women, increasing economic insecurity. While it is true that globalization has created more jobs and some new employment opportunities for women, it has also created new forms of informal and insecure employment. Outside the modern, organized, visible sector of work lies another sector where people, especially women, are unable to get proper work and engage in a variety of largely traditional activities to sustain themselves.

High levels of unemployment and the lack of secure employment are among the main factors that cause women workers to seek employment in the informal sector of the economy, and they do so for the most part because of the need to survive rather than as a matter of choice. In many countries, the opportunities for women to enter the formal sector are even more limited than men's and the informal sector becomes their only option.

In its more recent concluding comments, the Committee continues regularly to express its concern about the failure of many States Parties to report on the situation of women in the informal sector or about the lack of sufficient information and up-to-date data as well as the lack of a clear picture of the ability of women to benefit from new economic opportunities. It has requested several States Parties to provide detailed data on the formal and informal labour market disaggregated by sex, sector and occupational groups (Mali, Togo, and Venezuela at its 34th session; Malawi and Turkmenistan at its 35th session; and Georgia, Ghana, and Uzbekistan at its 36th session).

The Committee recently expressed concern that 86 per cent of working women in Ghana are employed in the informal sector of the economy, and only 4 per cent of women are employed in the formal public sector and 6 per cent in the formal private sector. It was also concerned about the apparent lack of monitoring mechanisms and enforcement of existing legislation. The Committee accordingly urged the State Party to ensure equal opportunities for women and men in the labour market, in accordance with Article 11 of the Convention; as well as the full implementation of the provisions of the Ghana Labour

Act 2003 by the public and private sectors, including through effective monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. The Committee further recommended that the State Party pay particular attention to the conditions of women workers in the informal sector with a view to ensuring their access to social services (combined third, fourth and fifth periodic report, Ghana, August 2006).

Sexual harassment and violence in the workplace

Equality in employment can be seriously impaired when women are subjected to gender-specific violence, such as sexual harassment in the workplace.

The recent report of the Secretary-General, *An In-depth Study on all Forms of Violence against Women*, mentions European surveys that have shown significant rates of sexual harassment in the workplace, with 40–50 per cent of women in the European Union reporting some form of sexual harassment or unwanted sexual behaviour in the workplace. Small surveys in Asia-Pacific countries also indicate that 30–40 per cent of women workers report some form of harassment, be it verbal, physical or sexual.

Gender-based violence is a form of discrimination that seriously inhibits women's ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men. These rights and freedoms include the right to just and favourable conditions of work. In General Recommendation No. 19, the Committee recommends that States Parties include in their reports information on sexual harassment and other forms of violence or coercion in the workplace.

Reconciling work with family life

Affordable childcare facilities, such as day care centres, are important if parents are to be able to combine family obligations with participation in working life. The Committee has regularly addressed the difficulties women face with reconciling their personal and family lives with their professional and public responsibilities. It is the view of the Committee that the high rate of part-time employment of women suggests that women still bear a larger share of family responsibilities. The recommendations of the Committee include:

- To take measures to assist women and men with striking a balance between family and employment responsibilities, among other things, through further awareness-raising and education initiatives for both women and men, including with respect to sharing tasks within the family and ensuring that part-time employment is not taken up exclusively by women;
- To adopt measures allowing for the reconciliation of family and professional responsibilities, including the provision of affordable childcare;
- To promote equal sharing of domestic and family tasks between women and men;
- The need to encourage fathers to make greater use of parental leave;
- To monitor the impact of regulations on part-time work and on parental leave;
- To improve the availability of affordable child care facilities; and
- To encourage men, including through awareness-raising, to take equal responsibility for childcare.

The Committee has commended Denmark for women's continued high level of participation in the labour market there and the measures it has taken in support of such participation by enabling both women and men to reconcile work and family life through extended maternity and parental leave schemes (sixth periodic report, Denmark, August 2006).

The role of parliamentarians

The elimination of discrimination requires deliberate, focused and consistent efforts and policies by all States Parties over a sustained period of time.

The importance and significance of CEDAW is not matched by its implementation strength. The gap between the formal guarantees laid down in CEDAW and the extent to which the rights are actually enjoyed in practice is frequently a wide one. Strong political will is required on the part of States Parties to the Convention.

Parliamentarians can play a major role in combating discrimination against women in the workforce and the workplace. Chairpersons and members of parliamentary committees on gender equality could become instrumental in initiating awareness-raising campaigns to stamp out gender stereotypes and preconceptions relating to both the economic cost of

hiring and employing women and women's roles and abilities, commitment and leadership style in the workplace. CEDAW is an important tool that can be used to legitimize parliamentary demands for gender equality. Possible actions include:

- Ascertaining whether there is a reservation to Article 11 and if so working for its full or partial withdrawal;
- Lobbying for a revision of laws and, if necessary, the ratification of relevant ILO Conventions which not only prohibit discrimination by law but also provide a positive duty to prevent discrimination and promote equality;
- Ensuring better implementation and enforcement of existing laws, rules and regulations at the national level;
- Lobbying for the setting up of effective control mechanisms at the national level such as strong labour inspectorates;
- Lobbying for the setting of concrete targets at the national level for women's labour force participation and unemployment rates, as well as for a narrowing of the gender wage gap, and taking specific measures to ensure that these targets are met;
- Encouraging the adoption of temporary special measures to fight against the inherent prejudice against women in senior positions so that women candidates are hired/ promoted in cases of equal merit;
- Supporting campaigns at all levels against the existing gender stereotypes in society (traditional division of roles in society, the family and the workplace) and promoting a better division of household and care responsibilities between women and men; and
- Promoting the conciliation of professional and private life for both sexes and investing in care facilities for children and the elderly.

Conclusion

CEDAW is a dynamic document that has proved to be flexible enough to adapt to changing international circumstances and attitudes, while preserving its spirit and integrity. The creation of conditions of equality and the eradication of legal, institutional and cultural barriers that prevent women's partici-

pation in economic activity and decision-making are examples of objectives that social policies and legislation should target. Parliamentarians can and should use CEDAW as a tool in their endeavours to ensure that women's increased participation in the

labour market has an empowering effect on them. They must take up the challenge of improving the lives of women so that they no longer remain invisible, unacknowledged and excluded from the protection and benefits afforded under Article 11 of CEDAW. ■

Mechanisms for Combating Discrimination, Exploitation, Abuse and Violence in the Workplace

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This presentation focuses on the promotion of women's economic and socio-cultural rights, notably their rights in the workplace, based on the experience of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Work is the principal source of revenue on which subsistence, survival and life itself depend. The right to work is a fundamental right, the enjoyment of which is a guarantee of dignity and self-respect. This right encompasses both the right to hold a job and the right to not be unjustly deprived of one.

Regarding enjoyment of this right, Article 3 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights provides that "The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights".

The right to work constitutes one of these economic, social and cultural rights that aim to protect the entire range of rights each and everyone needs to live a full, safe and healthy life in full freedom. Women, like men, are entitled to enjoy them without any discrimination whatsoever.

That is why Article 2, paragraph 1, of the Labour Code of the Democratic Republic of the Congo provides that work is a right and a duty for everyone. That a person is unfit for work can only be ascertained by a medical examiner.

Unfortunately, throughout the world, and specifically in developing countries, women are subjected to all forms of violence at work.

In some cases, such violence is the result of usage and custom or provisions of national laws that discriminate against women and ipso facto contravene international human rights standards in general and women's rights in particular that have nevertheless been ratified by governments.

In this way, from recruitment to signature of the job contract and other social benefits such as family

allowances and promotion to retirement, women's rights at the workplace are repeatedly violated.

1. Women, the right to work and social security in DRC

Congolese women and the right to work

Congolese legislation is a melting pot of usage and custom inspired by African cultures and openness to the outside world.

Regarding women's right to work, although Article 7 of the Labour Code has eliminated discrimination against women by rendering null and void the prerequisite of obtaining the husband's consent prior to accepting a job, one can still find in the outline of reasons in the Family Code the following expression: "In accordance with traditional thinking, it is hereby provided that, to undertake any legal act, married women must obtain the consent of their husband"¹. The prevailing Family Code in DRC is the act that governs civil and judicial law. It is composed of four volumes:

- Volume I: On Nationality;
- Volume II: On the Person;
- Volume III: On the Family;
- Volume IV: On Inheritance and Liberalities.

Article 215, Volume II on the Person, Title II on (Legal) Capacity, classifies married women as being legally unfit and stipulates the following:

"In the eyes of the law, the following persons are incompetent:

- Minors;
- Persons of legal age who are mentally insane and legally unfit;

- Persons of legal age who are feeble-minded, irresponsible, weakened by age or infirmed persons placed under guardianship;

The (legal) capacity of married women is somewhat limited in accordance with the present law.”

This is a case of flagrant violation of women’s civil and political rights, and of their economic and social rights, especially the right to work, because this right is tied implicitly and maliciously to the husband’s consent, as illustrated in Article 448 of the same Code.

Indeed, although labour law does not make it compulsory for married women to obtain the consent of their husband prior to being contracted, the signature of a job contract is in fact a legal act and employers automatically apply **Article 448 of the Family Code** which provides that: “Married women must obtain the consent of their husband for all legal acts for which they will be obliged to provide a service in person”.

To so do, husbands can rightfully invoke Article 215 of the same Code, if the matter is contested. And as a result, women can lose their jobs or are faced with the dilemma of having to choose between family and work. Very often, married women present false papers attesting to their civil status thereby “masking their married status” with a view to getting and keeping a job because the discriminatory provisions of the Family Code cited above are reinforced by the following articles:

- **Article 217:** (Legal) acts executed by legally incompetent persons in violation of the provisions of Article 215 are rendered null and void as a consequence.
- **Article 450:** Save for the exceptions outlined below and those provided for under the marriage regime, women shall not be allowed to go to court in civil matters or in matters concerning acquisition or disposal or enter into any agreement without the consent of their husband.

If the husband refuses to give his consent, the peace tribunal may give its approval. The husband’s consent remains general, but he can always revoke it.

When Article 450 of the Family Code is invoked, the courts and tribunals of the Democratic Republic of the Congo have no jurisdiction over a family that has remained intact after the wife has gone to

court against her husband. Often women resign themselves to their situation for the sake of their family.

Congolese women at work and social security

With regard to social security in the workplace, once more Congolese law only gives social benefits to the wife and children of working Congolese men on the grounds of limiting the accumulation of benefits. Although working women pay social security contributions, their husband and children are not entitled to social benefits. The same applies to survivor’s benefit, which is provided only to widows, not widowers.

At a first glance, it would appear that wives and widows are granted benefits but in reality, it is working men who are accorded rights.

These rights are the following:

- Family allowances;
- Pension;
- Survivor’s benefit and other social benefits, only women benefit from their husband’s contribution.

Sexual harassment at the workplace

When looking for work, the majority of women experience sexual harassment in lieu of an aptitude test. Those who are hired are often subjected to sexual violence as a condition for job promotion and other social benefits.

In certain environments, women only access subordinate jobs, logistical functions and other tasks because most men find it difficult to have a woman boss, even if she is competent.

2. Women in the police and armed forces

The police service and armed forces fall into a professional category where there is no employees’ union. This service is provided on command where only obeying orders from one’s superiors matters. If not, the severest form of repression is applied.

In these conditions, women who move through the ranks in the police service and armed forces experience several forms of violence on the basis of gender in a closed circle where names are not uttered.

Accounts have been collected from certain women police officers and military personnel on the basis of anonymity. They tell of how that they are indeed

victims of sexual harassment by their male superiors, and in some cases, are even forced to have sex with them.

Very often, the ranks or functions assigned to women in uniform are inferior to those of men and do not correspond to the training they have received, and even less to their seniority in the job. For instance, in DRC, unlike her male colleagues, the highest-ranking woman in the national police service is a colonel, but with responsibility to execute orders rather than give them in the department of social affairs of the national police.

3. Peasant women, the “women with a thousand arms”

Peasant women represent a category of women who bear the brunt of the precarious living conditions of the work environment, especially in developing countries.

They are called the “women with a thousand arms” because to ensure the survival of their families, they are the first to get up in the morning and the last to go to bed at night. And during this time, be they in good health or not, they are called on to do everything at the same time and on an ongoing basis: look after the children and their husband, go out to the fields, do the housework, walk long distances to fetch water, and convert the fruit of the fields into articles that tend to the basic needs of their family, etc,

4. Contribution of the Congolese Parliament

In order to combat discrimination, exploitation, abuse and violence against women in the workplace with

a view to reducing the risk and vulnerability that characterize enjoyment of these rights by women, the Congolese Parliament is dedicated to reforming Congolese law.

This reform involves repealing national laws that discriminate against women, bringing certain national laws in line with international human rights standards in general and international standards on women’s rights in particular, which in fact have already been ratified by the Congolese Government.

It is within this setting that the Congolese Parliament passed a law against sexual violence in all its forms.

The Senate Committee on Socio-Cultural Affairs, over which I preside, collaborates closely with non-governmental organizations actively engaged in promoting human rights.

To this end, we organize on a regular basis and in particular during the parliamentary recess, awareness days to reflect on implementing a gender-mainstreaming strategy in development policies and programmes in all sectors of national life.

The legislative and oversight functions of parliamentarians make them the safeguards par excellence against all violations of the rights of the electorate. In several countries, women represent the majority of that electorate. If we want to be re-elected, it is in our interest to promote the rights of those who place their trust in us to help shape their destiny.

That is why we should make respect for human rights, notably economic, social and cultural rights as well as monitoring such respect priorities on the working calendar of our parliamentary committees. ■

Endnotes

- 1 Outline of reasons of Act No. 87-010 on the Family Code in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Women's Right to Sustainable Development in Paraguay

Ms. María Cristina Semidei

Parliamentary Gender Expert, Paraguay

I would like to mention a few facts and figures regarding Paraguay's socio-economic development. Paraguay has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in Latin America, a sign of the extent of women's poverty and exclusion. Other figures are equally telling: 15 per cent of the country's mothers are between the ages of 15 and 19; only 36.2 per cent of rural women are attended by a personal physician; there are – and this is especially alarming – 193 maternal deaths for every 100,000 live births, a horrifying figure made worse by the fact that 75 per cent of those deaths are the result of shortcomings in health services; women account for 38 per cent of the economically active population; 6 of every 10 women workers are not wage-earners and generate their own incomes. The unemployment rate for women is almost twice that of men.

Another figure worth mentioning is the rise in the number of households headed by women. The available data indicate that for 70 per cent of the population, the woman is the family breadwinner; because women's jobs tend to be precarious, these households are more vulnerable to poverty.

These data lead us to conclude that while the Cabinet has a good number of women members, those women are unable to make the hoped-for changes. As a result, Paraguayan women remain at the bottom of the ladder, continue to earn less than men and have little or no decision-making power.

Nationwide poverty and lack of jobs has prompted many Paraguayan women to migrate abroad.

The latest data reveal that the number of women migrating to Spain has gradually grown: the percentage of households deprived of their principal breadwinner rose from 63 per cent in 2005 to 66 per cent in 2006. The figures are indicative of homes breaking down and the consequent social problems.

I would also like to share information on elderly women. Their unprotected situation is the result of multiple and successive inequalities. It is equally deplorable to observe the percentage of elderly women who have lower incomes in all countries.

In 1995, the Paraguayan Ministry of Education and Culture and the President's Secretariat for Women (which has ministerial rank in the Executive) launched a joint programme, the National Programme for Equal Opportunity and Results for Women in Education (PRIOME), which develop public gender policy and a series of activities intended to produce real change; the changes have not yet been made, however, and Paraguayan women remain in ignorance of their rights and continue to earn far less than men. Although health services are absolutely free under the law, mothers cannot reach them because they are practically inaccessible; in addition, the referral and counter-referral systems do not work, and the Assistance Centres do not have what they need to save lives.

“[W]e have to devise and implement education and economic policies in order to evaluate their impact on men and women and to detect and correct their flaws in terms of gender equality.”

Challenges: that's what we face; challenges to guarantee access to preventive and integrated health care for women throughout their lives, to provide quality services and equitable access to them, and to achieve equality between men and women in terms of job stability, employment conditions, and access to and control of economic resources.

In particular, we have to devise and implement education and economic policies in order to evaluate

their impact on men and women and to detect and correct their flaws in terms of gender equality. It does not seem likely that so many shortcomings will be dealt with in the short term for the purposes of sustainable development.

Poverty must be fought by generating jobs and overcoming informality through policies that are formulated and managed on the basis of the law and with an eye to social justice.

It is no less important to improve women's conditions of internment and ensure that proceedings against them are handled with dispatch, so as to protect them from abuse at the hands of the officials in charge of these institutions.

These are some of the facts that motivate us to take action to change the situation.

With the participation of the State, the people and other organizations, the educational, employment,

political and social disadvantages have to be reduced. These are, of course, long processes that in all cases require political determination.

We are learning to live as a democracy. We are still finding it difficult to accept gender equality, and women are simply being denied the opportunities they deserve.

We must all bear some of the blame, because the fault does not lie with the State alone. Discrimination is ingrained in our social conduct: it will be up to us to overcome it.

Women must participate socially and politically. Their self-esteem depends on it. This is the way to build genuine equal opportunity, not just on paper but in achievable programmes that promote innovative and positive positions and that enable women to take part in "Equal opportunities" in all areas: social, political and economic. ■



**WHAT NEXT? STRATEGIES
FOR THE FUTURE**

7

Overview and Debate

This session aimed to identify priorities for the parliamentary committees and mechanisms to support progress. The session focused on the central role of parliamentary committees, in particular the need for cooperation with international organizations and other partners involved in this field.

The panellists for this session were Baroness Uddin, Member of the House of Lords, the United Kingdom, and Ms. Ratansi, Member of the House of Commons, Chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, Canada. Baroness Uddin and Ms. Ratansi focused on the challenges facing women in the United Kingdom and Canada, respectively, and on what is being done to overcome these challenges.

The first challenge highlighted was that of under-representation in decision-making bodies, and in parliaments in particular. In order for policies to be equitable, they must reflect the needs and demands of all sectors of society. Although the United Kingdom and Canada are both multiparty states, the views of women and minorities are often marginalized. The fact that women are often under-represented in politics hints at an ongoing process of discrimination that prevents women from having their voices heard.

A number of factors embedded in both the structure of parliament and the structure of society inhibit women from participating more in the decision-making process. First, the ethic of parliaments has traditionally not been “woman-friendly.” This is because parliaments have traditionally been male-dominated structures, which means that women entering the arena are faced with the challenge of acquainting themselves with unfamiliar norms and customs. Furthermore, the lack of work-life balance usually demanded by a career in parliament often conflicts with the responsibilities of women who, as the primary caregivers, have a larger burden of unpaid work.

Ms. Ratansi described the work environment as a “double-edged sword” that presents challenges for women regardless of whether they participate in the formal or the informal sector. Some of the challenges faced by women in the formal sector include gender-based discrimination; a noticeable remuneration gap; restricted access to markets, services and resources; and the increased demand for care work due to an aging population. There is, moreover, still a problem of **government accountability**, which has been undermined by multinational corporations (MNCs). The proliferation of such MNCs has been as a result of economic liberalization and has served to open up the jobs market and create more employment opportunities. Yet, since MNCs are often incorporated in foreign countries, there is little that domestic legislative agendas can do to guarantee protective measures. Ms. Ratansi said that, in general, international labour policies have been unable to resolve this situation and, as a result, workers in these sectors remain largely unprotected.

Some of the challenges facing women workers in the formal sector are the same as those facing women in the informal sector. However, in the case of Canada, the issues in the latter category overlap considerably with issues pertaining to the rights of **minorities and indigenous people**. For Canada, as with most countries, workers in the informal sector are usually economic migrants or individuals from minority groups who move to the cities in search of better employment opportunities. These workers are often ‘invisible’, because they are either under-represented or illegally employed, and it is thus difficult to assess their needs and target policies accordingly. Furthermore, the large urban-rural divide in Canada, which results from the geography of the country and the diversities in population density, is another obstacle to the formation and implementation of uniform national policies.

Overcoming these barriers is a necessary precondition for the achievement of both *de facto* and *de jure* gender equality. The panellists underlined that to contend with the all of these issues, civil society, governments and international organizations should adopt **gender-sensitive reforms** that ensure transparency and accountability.

The purpose of civil society is to challenge the government on key issues and ensure that policies reflect the needs and wants of all members of society. Members of civil society, such as NGOs and trade unions, have the power to change the structure of society, but they must be active. Moreover, they must include women and gender-sensitive men as agents of change. NGOs and trade unions need to work closely with the media in order to fight discrimination. There is also a need for women role models who can oppose gender-based stereotyping and give other women the confidence to stand up for their rights. Furthermore, trade unions should advocate for mentor schemes as a way of encouraging entrepreneurship and increased participation by women in the private sector.

“In terms of structure, the experiences of the United Kingdom and Canada show that for pluralist societies, a multiparty system of governance based on the principle of equal representation allows for the greatest participation of marginalized groups.”

According to Ms. Ratansi, “in order to have equality, governments need to have the will to change both their structure and their policies.” In terms of structure, the experiences of the United Kingdom and Canada show that for pluralist societies, a multiparty system of governance based on the principle of equal representation allows for the greatest participation of marginalized groups. Parliamentarians should therefore encourage women to run for office, and should strive to reform the parliamentary process to allow its women members to achieve work-life balance. Parliamentary committees and women’s caucuses also have an important role in incorporating women and their views into the decision-making process. Experience has shown that the presence of women in

parliament has a direct effect on the types of legislation that discussed. It is therefore crucial to promote the participation of women in this regard. Parliamentarians have an important role to play in pushing for the implementation of gender-sensitive legislation. This would include, for example, legislative provision for social security; training and education for women and children; and increased funding for public services, particularly for health care and childcare facilities. The importance of having an inclusive Charter of Rights that defines the values of plural societies and guides the formation of conscience-issue policies was also mentioned.

International organizations must make gender equality a priority. A wide gap persists between the formal guarantees laid down in international conventions and the extent to which rights are enjoyed in practice. “The cost of doing nothing is too expensive; international bodies should pressure governments to meet their agenda.” There is a particular need for unity – parliaments, international organizations and civil-society have a responsibility to their constituents to work together to implement international standards for the protection of human rights.

Plenary Debate

During the plenary debate, several participants spoke of the challenges still facing the achievement of gender equality in the employment sector. **Women with disabilities** was one of the major areas of concern. It was noted that disabled women represent one of the most vulnerable groups in society. They face distinct challenges when entering the workforce and more must be done to include their needs and views in the decision-making process.

The success of women entrepreneurs was mentioned by many, but it was pointed out that, in general, the private sector still contains pockets of resistance to notions of gender equality. Discrimination against women in the workplace is still a major factor, and trade unions have a responsibility to resist discriminatory practices. However, in order for trade unions to be effective, “women must work for women”; there must be a critical mass of women represented in trade unions in order for them to have an impact on policies. More must therefore be done to inspire women to advocate for their rights. The media can be a vital tool in fighting ingrained stereotypes and promoting women role models. Gender equality is a

universal ideal that crosses socio-cultural boundaries. Nonetheless, policies for promoting equality in employment must be sensitive to the political, economic and religious contexts of each country.

Several recommendations and future strategies were suggested as a means of overcoming the challenges raised in the session. An emphasis was put on the need for awareness-raising through **education and training**. Women and men need to be informed of their rights as well as the legal remedies available to them in case those rights are violated. Free and universal primary education is a right stipulated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and more recent initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals. School curricula should address human rights issues and fight stereotypes. More must also be done in terms of job training, the promotion of research and the use of new technologies to ensure that women have the transferable skills required to be competitive in an increasingly globalized labour market.

Civil society should take an active role in reorganizing the work environment. NGOs and trade unions should adopt decent work agendas that target the most vulnerable. There is an explicit need to reduce the burden of informal work on women to allow them to enter the employment market. As such, strategies should aim to improve women's access to employment opportunities, resources and social security programmes. Crucially, any initiative must include both men and women and must address the concerns of women in both the informal and the private sectors. It was underscored that the introduction of legislation is not enough to induce real change. Legislation must be accompanied by effective implementation measures. Parliaments are in a good position to carry out an oversight function and to monitor the progress of gender-equality initiatives.

Although it was emphasized that a top-down approach to gender equality is not sufficient and that change must come from the grass roots, the central role played by **international organizations** was nonetheless noted. The international level is increasingly important for several reasons. First, the recent proliferation of MNCs emphasizes the need for comprehensive international labour policies that seek to create and enforce standards of employment. Second, women are still significantly under-represented at the national level. Recent studies have shown that a

critical mass of women is needed for any change to be realized. There is thus more of an opportunity for women to make an impact if they coordinate at the international level in such a way as to circumvent national barriers. International organizations can furthermore compile a record of best practices, which states can draw on to help them reconcile dilemmas, such as how to balance the demands of modernity with the rigidity of traditional attitudes.

In order for international organizations to have a positive impact, **parliamentarians** must first be informed of their existence. The Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians, established by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, is an example of a potentially beneficial forum. More needs to be done to spread awareness of the initiatives being taken and the instruments available for governments to use as guidelines when passing legislation. The importance of legal instruments, such as CEDAW and its Optional Protocol, cannot be overemphasized in this regard. The treaty bodies established to oversee the implementation of these conventions must put pressure on governments to fulfil their reporting obligations. The large burden that the state reporting procedure places on States Parties should be recognized and contributions from NGOs should be encouraged in developing a State Party report. The value of shadow reports submitted by NGOs should also be acknowledged. Close monitoring of the implementation of international standards should take place regularly, including the organization of follow-up sessions in parliament and elsewhere.

Although treaty bodies can assist in the implementation of international standards, the ultimate effectiveness of agreements is contingent on measures taken by governments to give effect to their legal obligations. Some legal instruments, such as CEDAW and its Optional Protocol, provide for **positive measures** to help States Parties reach their declared objectives. This has been exemplified by the introduction of quotas, which many states have set in order to enhance the representation of women in parliament. Other countries, such as France, have supplemented the quota system with a policy of financial penalties, which targets the political parties that are failing to meet their quota. Some participants called for inter-governmental organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to offer economic incentives to encourage states to implement gender-sensitive policies. ■

Strategies for the Future

Baroness Uddin

Member of the House of Lords,
United Kingdom

This is a brief presentation about the priorities of the United Kingdom. Parliamentarians globally share many successes and in equal measure have a long way to go to achieve equality and justice in the work place and more generally in society.

In the United Kingdom there is no overall consensus about how to arrive at a higher proportion of women in the political and public spheres. The Labour Movement took a great leap of faith to increase the number of women in parliament by introducing procedures for all-women shortlists, but this was subsequently challenged and deemed unfair. Nevertheless, in a short period the proportion of women in the UK parliament increased from 9 per cent in 1993 to 20 per cent in 1997, demonstrating that there is no shortage of women seeking public office and that, given the opportunity, women will participate in democratic structures. As a result of this pioneering work, it is now universally accepted that unless there are women in the decision-making structures of society and government, equality is likely to take longer to achieve. According to a study conducted by the British Equal Opportunities Commission, it will take 200 years to achieve equal numbers of women in decision making structures, and even longer to achieve a representative proportion of women from ethnic minority backgrounds. In 2004, the government introduced legislation to allow political parties to designate certain parliamentary constituencies and local authority wards for women only if they choose to. It is hoped that such measures will eventually change the face of local and national governing structures.

There are many examples of the ways in which women parliamentarians work inside their respective parliaments. The UK Parliament is no exception: there are many instances of collaboration across party political lines. There is a constructive mecha-

nism in place through the All-Party Parliamentary Groups, which facilitate members' work across a number of important matters, ranging from disability to domestic violence, to children, to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, to Afghanistan, Iraq, Bangladesh, and so on. Such groups allow parliamentarians not only to discuss key and current issues with others but also to work with NGOs and experts in the field. These groups often invite relevant ministers to address their gatherings where they can be questioned by NGO partners.

“In the UK, approximately 20 per cent of the members in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords are women.”

The UK has taken a number of important steps on the journey towards change, such as all-women shortlists for elections; legislation to increase the status of women in the work place, including statutory rights to basic minimum pay; legislation on domestic violence; and maternity and paternity provisions as well as providing the legal framework to increase women's participation in local government and in parliament. The Equality Unit has been placed at the heart of government under the Leader of the House of Commons and Minister for Women, Harriet Harman. This is of great importance in signalling that addressing the issue of the under representation of women is a top priority. The new priorities of the Minister for Women have been made public and include addressing the pay gap, improving women's economic participation, strengthening the work life

balance, providing mentoring opportunities, improving skills and training and addressing the empowerment and increased participation of women from ethnic minorities.

In the UK, approximately 20 per cent of the members in both the House of Commons and the

House of Lords are women. In the Scottish Parliament this figure is 36 per cent, in the London Assembly it is 38 per cent and in the Welsh Assembly it is 45 per cent. This is not yet satisfactory but I am proud to say that we are marching towards achieving the standards set by our Nordic friends. ■

What Next? Strategies for the Future

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi

Member of the House of Commons,
Chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee
on the Status of Women, Canada

In order to look ahead, one first has to examine lessons learned within the context of globalization. Transnational companies and their practices basically dilute the legislative agenda with respect to labour relations. This, in turn, leads to a lot of tensions and a constantly changing work environment. For some women, entering the workforce is like a double-edged sword because they end up working in the informal sector, which does not offer much protection or provide the necessary remuneration. At the same time, they continue their unpaid domestic work. As well, women employed in traditional occupations such as teaching and nursing are paid less than those employed in non-traditional occupations. Indeed, the world is in need of gender champions.

In order to achieve equality, governments have to determine how to make it happen. For example, in Morocco, the top leadership is committed to change. Pakistan has endeavoured to make women agents of change. Although women are becoming increasingly well-educated, professionalized and are acquiring entrepreneurial skills, they continue to face challenges – the challenges of discrimination, glass ceilings or lateral ceilings, access to credit, markets, and lack of networking capabilities.

The other issue that women face is the work–family life balance, and women seem to have a heavy burden in terms of unpaid work. In Canada, women are called the “sandwich” generation, the generation that has to look after both their children and their elderly parents, and, with a nuclear family, it has become a very difficult task.

Women have been great agitators in Canada. At the Canadian Parliament, there are statues of the “Famous Five”. These were five women who advocated for having women considered as “persons” – hence the famous 1929 Persons Case. Voting had

been very sporadic in Canada and only really came into effect when women of the suffragette movement said: “We will agitate until you give us the right to vote.” So, in 1918, municipal voting came about and, in 1930, all women were able to vote. However, the aboriginal peoples only won the right to vote in federal elections in 1960. One high-profile Canadian woman is Nellie McClung – one of the Famous Five – but among our contemporaries there is also Louise Arbour, the United Nations Human Rights Commissioner. She is part of the judiciary of Canada and she has been breaking barriers in all areas.

Between 1992 and 2001, the number of women graduates increased by 10%. In 2001, women accounted for almost 60 per cent of all post-secondary graduates.

In Canada, 58 per cent of women (7.3 million women) between the ages of 15 and 65 are in paid employment. The population of Canada is 32 million, of which 15 million are of working age, and women therefore constitute 58 per cent of the working population, compared with 42 per cent for men. The growth of women in the workforce outpaces men two to one, and in the last 20 years, women have started many more new businesses than men. Women currently own more than 800,000 businesses in Canada, and in 2005, accounted for more business start-ups than men. Women-owned businesses contribute over \$18-billion to the Canadian economy.

There is a women’s executive network that presents, on an annual basis, the top 100 most powerful women in the country. In essence, it shows who the top women are in various fields. These are the 100 most powerful women who occupy places in the oil-fields, in the oil companies, as chairs of the Toronto Stock Exchange, in banks, in academia, in journalism, in medicine, and in the public service. Canadians

decided that the cost of doing nothing was too expensive. We all need to learn that we cannot sit back and say that everything is fine; we need to take the blinkers off and say what is acceptable, what is not and move ahead. Since 1929, women have made great strides, and women's caucuses, civil society and NGOs have been working together to push through legislative changes to reflect the changing environments. In some areas, the tax system, tax credits, and national child tax benefit were pushed by the women's caucus. The women's caucus has been a great source of wisdom for parliamentarians, and it is important to have more women participating in Parliament because they do make a difference.

Educational savings plans, retirement savings plans, student loan deductions from tax returns and pay equity legislation have been debated in Parliament. Legislation is an important tool, but implementation is even more important in order to really effect change. There are legislative provisions for old-age security, for seniors who do not have sufficient income, and a guaranteed income supplement. All these issues have been pushed by women and civil society, because they are critical issues.

Human Resources and Social Development Canada funds various programs for women such as training and skills upgrading programs. Citizenship and Immigration Canada also provides men and women who are newcomers to Canada with free language training. Canada is a bilingual country so there are two official languages. There is funding for social programmes, for example universal health care.

There has been very healthy debate on the issue of childcare, because childcare and early learning strategies for children are critical. Quebec has been a prime example of pushing the childcare agenda because women who go out to work and who want to be productive in both their careers and in their family life need some form of reassurance that their children are well looked after, that they are getting the essentials in terms of education and development. There has been a National Seniors Council created to look after the seniors' agenda, and every person, regardless of race, colour, creed or religion, is protected under the Charter of Rights.

Canada is a very "aware" society, aware of its pluralism. Toronto is the most diverse city in the world. In some schools, the teachers say that there are 53 languages spoken. Great strides have been made in the areas where women are powerful, such as in the

banks and universities. In fact, the President of the University of Alberta is Dr. Indira Samarasekera, who is originally from Sri Lanka. In the Canadian Parliament, there are parliamentarians from 30 different nationalities – i.e. persons who were born outside of Canada and who sit in the Canadian Parliament. Although women only represent between 21 and 25 per cent of members of parliament, they have been able to push a women's agenda.

To recapitulate, one of the major challenges facing working women is the work–family life balance. The public sector in Canada – where women account for 53 per cent of the workforce – attempts to contribute to the work–life balance by providing day care. In a country with a \$13.5 billion dollar surplus, it seems absurd that there should be poverty, including child poverty.

“With the Olympics coming in 2010 to Vancouver, it has asked the Government to provide a response in terms of what its plans are to stop human trafficking, to ensure that women and children are protected.”

An important task that parliamentary committees perform, including the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, is to oversee federal government spending. Some Ministers may be reluctant to appear before Committees because they are questioned and held to account on the performance of their departments. The Committee has conducted a study on the economic security of women and on the trafficking of women. With the Olympics coming in 2010 to Vancouver, it has asked the Government to provide a response in terms of what its plans are to stop human trafficking, to ensure that women and children are protected. The Committee has held information sessions on gender budgeting.

So what is a significant challenge for Canada? One of the challenges is the size of the country. Canada is very concerned about its urban–rural divide. Before the USSR collapsed, Canada was the second largest country in the world. For example, as an illustration, seven Frances can fit into Quebec alone. The country is vast, with a population of 32

million, large swathes of uninhabitable land, and remote aboriginal communities living in places that are only accessible by plane. The cost of the challenges of getting services there is very high and infrastructure development may become quite impractical.

In Canada, we continue to have a healthy debate on issues surrounding pluralism. One of the biggest challenges facing Canada is the gender-sensitive approach it imposes when giving grants and development funds through agencies such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). As part of the Canada parliamentary groups to different countries, field visits may include assessments of the transparency and accountability of how development aid is put to use. There is also a healthy debate on

the occurrence of poverty in a country with a surplus of \$13.5 billion.

What are the next steps? From the perspective of lessons learned, although international organizations have been framing labour laws and human rights laws for some 25 years now, gender equity has still not been achieved. It is an ongoing challenge and female parliamentarians and supportive male parliamentarians have to make serious and concerted efforts to achieve this goal. Although the situation differs from country to country, there are some best practices which can be adopted. International organizations should pressure governments in the developed and developing world to ensure these matters are addressed in the global agenda. ■

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