



Plenary Report 21 January 2011: Taking Stock of the Status of Women in Today's World

Keynote address: Susan Hopgood, EI President

Historical overview of women's progress, changes and gains made globally; what has been accomplished so far, the challenges faced and strides needed further to be on the move:

Susan Hopgood reminded all delegates of the movement for suffrage in England in the late 19th Century, tracing all the way to the latest instance of granting voting rights to women in Switzerland in 1973, as seminal to the present day progress in women's status globally. She commended the Indian sisters for their ceaseless efforts to secure position of 10 million women in the parliament and the ongoing advocacy for 30 percent reservation for women in parliament. CEDAW (1979) has designated "discrimination" as a violation of human rights and advocated for free primary quality education. The central question, she posed is: how do we measure progress? Is it measured by the Right to Life, the Right to Liberty and the Right to Security of the person? If so, how about infanticide on the rise in India? Female foeticide? Female genital mutilation prevails in most of Africa. Violence against children and other forms of increasing violence have increased across the globe. 56 million children will still be out of school in 2015.

Conclusion: "We are still on the move for equality. As trade unionists we have a critical role to play and for this we have to hold on to each other."

Panel Discussion

Christine Nathan, Regional Specialist in Workers' Activities, ILO South-East Asia: Gender equality and women's rights 15 years on from Beijing Platform for Action - Legislative and corrective measures in the world of work

Christine Nathan noted that we have reasons to celebrate. Since 1995, legislation and corrective measures to ensure gender equality have been put in place; there is a high rate of ratification of ILO Conventions 100 and 111; direct discrimination is being addressed; decreasing pay gaps are evident; women's career advancement is being promoted through affirmative action; wider opportunity choices are open for women; remuneration and recruitment are ensured without consideration of gender; decent work for domestic workers is being advocated, etc. However, inequalities have been perpetuated due to particularly the financial crisis which has placed women's progress at risk. Women are unequally represented



in the informal sector; and therefore the need to fight for more legislation in this sector is obvious. Strong women need strong Trade Unions. Struggle for unionizing is ongoing (in Bangkok region: 6 out of 10 rating; for ILO's work and contribution 5 out of 10 rating given).

Conclusion: "We need to break down walls of culture, tradition and religion; strengthen power to organize and fight for ratification of Gender Equality Conventions."

Relevant questions (Q) or comments (C) from the floor and answers from panelists

Q: How can the most challenging barriers of tradition, culture and religion become addressed, particularly in our developing countries?

A: These barriers have to be faced from home, we have to fight them through socialization, awareness raising and conscientization Education by mothers and teachers on changing stereotypical roles would go a long way in bringing about changes in tradition and culture. **Unions could also carry out awareness-raising sessions on these issues.**

Q. We understand that the role of public policies is very important. Should not we also discuss legislation on media? Media is constantly portraying women as pleasure objects and creating a certain attitude and opinion in the society through these images. Media regulation is not sufficient – we should advocate for media censorship through appropriate legislation.

A. Media legislation is absolutely necessary. We agree.

Q. How can we overcome the situation of non-implementation of laws?

A. **The role of the unions is very important in this regard. Unions must speak on behalf of the laws and fight the battle for implementation. Those who can fight must. Within the ILO, there is a Complaints Process and action available to assist in furthering the implementation process at the national level. But unions must take the initiative to set the motion in action.**

Fatima da Silva, Vice President of EI regional committee in Latin America: Women, Power and Politics

Fatima emphasized that the importance of women in politics and in economy is absolutely crucial. Globally only one percent of women have land tenure and ownership; women control 50% in food production; 14% in leadership position and only 10% have any kind of property ownership. Demands on women are very high. Power is to be gained only through militancy. Equality, solidarity and constant struggle for power is essential. There is an urgent need to bring down ethnic and racial barriers. It is true that there are many women in the banking and financial sectors but only in secondary positions. Perhaps, the same salary for same jobs has been gained but no real equality in terms of leadership in education.



Conclusion: “We need public space for women; it is not enough to elect women in leadership positions in politics or in decision making positions; we have to help these women and oversee what they do, so that they can promote and pursue further the issues of gender equality.”

Relevant questions (Q) and comments (C) from the floor and answers from panelists

Q. How should we strategize to bring younger women into union membership?

A. We could organize them around health issues, maternity protection, safety of children based on their needs. It is only when we can address their relevant needs that they would see the relevance of joining unions. **Unions should prioritize organizing and including participation of younger women.**

C. Change must begin with us as women. We must ask ourselves: why not more women as leaders? We must be challenged by the thought that change can only begin with us and not with maintaining or talking about gender stereotypes.

Gemma Adaba, former ITUC representative to the United Nations: Financing Gender Equality for full employment and decent work for women - Strengthening the gender dimensions in economic empowerment issues

Gemme Adaba elaborated on how connecting the global to national levels is crucial. In order to strengthen the gender dimensions in economic empowerment issues, it is essential to get into the text of the internationally agreed upon documents and ensure that governments across the world take them up at national levels. The Doha Declaration of 2008 is strong on the gender perspectives as brought into the text: Article 12: “realization of full productive employment”. Budget cuts induced by the financial crisis have had a negative impact on the provision of quality public services; hence setback on promotion of gender equality provisions too. The crux of the problem lies in the neo-liberal model of globalization which must be seriously countered. The ILO Jobs Pact and 2009 ILO Resolution on Gender Equality are important documents to consider at a global level, expected to be implemented at national levels throughout.

Conclusion: “We need to maintain the link between global and local/national; look at money; let’s connect; mind gaps between policy and practice; it is keeping the link between the global agreements and national practice that would ultimately lead to reduction in poverty and further promotion of gender equality measures – fight for ratification and implementation.”



Relevant questions (Q) and comments (C) from the floor and answers from panelists

C. Women have suffered most from the financial crisis. We have been penalized more than others. 18 billion dollars were taken away from public sectors. That is the biggest gender violence.

C. Breakthroughs and advancements are great. But we need to have access to economic empowerment for political provisions to become real. How to make the quantum leap from paper to practice is the real issue.

Jan Eastman, EI Deputy General Secretary: EI Quadrennial Report on The Status of Women in Unions, Education and Society, and conclusions of the Pre-conference of Networks

Jan Eastman presented the highlights of the survey report which analyzed gender equality within EI's member organizations and conducted a survey among EI's member organizations on various issues. 138 organizations from 95 countries responded to the survey, representing 34 percent of EI's member organizations. Some interesting findings were mentioned. Women constitute the majority of the teaching force and the union membership, but they are underrepresented in the union leadership; the higher the decision making body, the lower is the percentages of women. Though half of the unions have mechanisms to ensure gender equality in high decision-making positions, there is no clear indication whether these mechanisms have improved the situation or not. The most relevant barriers to education are related to child labour, lack of school infrastructure and gender stereotypes. The prevailing gap between gender existing laws in various countries and the reality is due to considerable impact of gender stereotypes, male networks and the unequal division of family responsibilities. **With regard to priority issues and activities that EI should be working towards, the highest rated were quality public education for all, investment in education, women in higher education, gender equality education in curricula, schools as safe sanctuaries and gender stereotypes.**

Conclusion: "This report with conclusions drawn from survey study is expected to provoke thinking on what and how to focus further in affecting progress on gender equality in the work of EI and its members. This is therefore not the end of the process but a catalyst."

Relevant questions (Q) and comments (C) from the floor and answers from panelists

Q. What should we do to make Gender Equality Committees more powerful and generate more positive results? If not for these Committees, gender issues do not seem to be taken up completely?



A. We should think of how we can make use of these survey findings. Is the need for male bonding and female bonding equally important? Is male bonding a barrier or asset to our equality campaign? We should have combined human bonding to get to power positions.

C. Gender equality is not a women's issue alone. Both women and men have to share work at home and school. How can we get more men involved in gender issues? Men learn "gender justice" from their mothers, who play a significant role in the lives of their sons. All government bodies should have 50/50 balance of women and men in their decision making positions and in all positions per se.

Q/C. How can we have gender practices operational in the Unions? What is the cost involved? There is only superficial count but one area that needs case analysis or even detailed analysis is the gender budget analysis. There should be more initiatives taken by Committees to question the costs involved. Generally, only 5-6 percent of the overall budget of a State is devoted to women's issues. We need to have policies, strategies on how to allocate budget to get gender practices functioning in unions. Are there cases of unions doing gender budgeting?

Joyce Powell, NEA Executive Board: Union action to achieve gender equality and full participation of women - Power in numbers and need for women in leadership positions

Joyce Powell recounted the 154 years of history of union action for gender equality and women's full participation in the National Education Association of the United States. It was established in 1867 but it was only in 1910 that the first woman president was elected. In 1979, the first woman president of the union was elected at the local level. The Education Amendment (Title IX) came into force only in 1972, following the landmark Civil Rights Act in 1964. Access to educational programmes and opportunities have undoubtedly grown with even an opening of sports arena for women, yet only 20 percent of leaders in unions are women where 75 percent of teachers as union members are women. The models in leadership roles have now been forged by leaders like Mary Futrel (President of NEA), Sharon Borough (President of ITUC) and Susan Hopgood (President of EI). There is power in numbers and more women in leadership positions is what needs to be striven towards, together with campaigns for a living wage and absolute prevention of sexual harassment and violence of all kinds.

Conclusion: "Our collective action as unions can play a significant role in improving the lives of women and children. We must have the kind of funding that will ensure every child an excellent public education with all its opportunities as well as challenges."



Relevant questions (Q) and comments (C) from the floor and answers from panelists

Q. With regard to equal pay for work of equal value, there is no discrepancy in the overall scale in some regions; but there are other factors which interfere with performances: family responsibilities and care issues; feminization of teaching services, particularly for younger children; teaching younger children is seen as easier and therefore not as important; weaknesses in the management of the education sector as a whole; the decreasing quality of teachers, etc. These issues have to be grappled with when we discuss “equal pay for work of equal value” related issues.

Q. There is a new kind of exploitation of educated women. Use of scientific technology: female foeticide through amniocentesis is increasing. As women have become more educated, why is it that they are unable to stop violence? Honour killings also happen to educated women.

A. As women, we have achieved many things. In the 1960s, the situation was worse. But violence is not only a family issue. It is a state issue. No tradition alone can make a safe home, safe school, or safe country. State must intervene. Our fight is basic: “Right to Birth”, “Right to Education” and “Right to Protection” are all part of this fight. We have to make sure not only of academic education but also social and political education of all.

Floor Discussion

*(At the end of the panel presentations, the Panel Chair Sylvia Borren told the audience the story of how in 1998, during the **Global March against Child Labour**, she had been approached by a youngster who asked her these questions: Do you know about child labour? Are you doing anything about child labour? Can you do more? The last question has remained in her memory as a strikingly provocative question. So, now she posed the same question as an opener to the floor discussions: CAN YOU DO MORE?)*

Notes on discussions that do not fall under the issues above

Diversity – inclusiveness of ethnic and indigenous communities

Q. One issue that needs to be addressed is how to be more inclusive of ethnic and indigenous communities in our movement.

A. The intersection of gender, class and ethnicity deserves quite a lot of attention. **The unions have to be more aware and sensitive to the way we work. Special Committees have to be instituted to give public space and voice to indigenous groups. The ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous People views them as “workers” whose rights need be defended. Special awareness-raising is necessary to bring their issues to the forefront of public attention and unions have the responsibility to do that.**



C. All of us are teachers but first of all we are women. We come from diverse cultures and regions – from the western capitalism and the eastern spiritualism. We must also consider what the meeting points are between the western and eastern perspectives and philosophies on all these issues.

Q. How can we have equality without freedom and liberation?

A. Lack of just and sustainable peace in Palestine is affecting us globally and we all grieve with you in your terrible situation and the sad plight of your country.

Trafficking and sexual exploitation

Q. 16 percent of national income for Thailand comes from sex workers. Sexual exploitation is witnessed all around this hotel. How can we implicate and reflect this issue in our final resolutions of this conference? What is the role of ILO Regional office on this?

A. One of the reasons why we are in Bangkok is to use this opportunity to focus on these issues. The questions of trafficking and child sexual exploitation pose acute and chronic problems.

The various departments of the ILO and the NGOs have held several meetings to discuss whether sex trade should be legalized. But the sex workers themselves were not interested in this. Can we also register the clients? This was their question. ILO has used skills training and entrepreneurship development initiatives to wean away sex workers from their trade and to fight against their poverty and unemployment. There has been some element of success in this. Yet, another strategy may be to work through the education and awareness-raising or even penalization of the clients themselves – one NGO network is exploring this strategy.

Q. What has been the role of union in dealing with trafficking issues?

Unions have been working for legislation against trafficking and engaged in awareness-raising initiatives. A number of mechanisms are in place: Code of Ethics for employment and recruitment; criminalization for those working under age; partnering with international transport sector; and criminalization of trafficking related activities overall.